

**THE TEXT IS FLY  
WITHIN THE BOOK  
ONLY**



H694-2

Hoellering      \$2.50  
Furlough

H694-2

## **Keep Your Card in This Pocket**

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**Public Library**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

## **Keep Your Card in This Pocket**



LIBRARY

JAN 23 1950

APR 17 '50









# *Furlough*

THIS EDITION IS PRODUCED IN FULL COMPLIANCE WITH  
ALL WAR PRODUCTION BOARD CONSERVATION ORDERS

ALSO BY FRANZ HOELLERING

*The Defenders*

A NOVEL

Parts of "Furlough" appeared serially in *Red Book* magazine under the titles, "Furlough in Germany" and "The Gods Are Veiling Their Faces."

# FURLOUGH

A NOVEL BY

*Franz Hoellering*

NEW YORK

THE VIKING PRESS

1944

COPYRIGHT 1943 AND 1944 BY FRANZ HOELLERING  
PUBLISHED BY THE VIKING PRESS IN AUGUST 1944  
PUBLISHED ON THE SAME DAY IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA  
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED  
PRINTED IN U.S.A.

# I

THE Russian night was bleak. When the narrow track of the improvised field railway curved, the German soldier lying on the little flat car at the end of the train saw the gleam of the asthmatic locomotive far ahead on the snow, now to the right, now to the left. To keep from falling asleep, he tried to count the turns.

The soldier lay prone on the ice-covered planks. With his hands he held on to an iron bar in front of him; with his feet he braced himself against the rear bar. It took all his strength. The icy wind that swept the night pierced his clothing and his skin and flesh. He felt as if he were lying naked in the cold. At any moment, if he did not hold fast, he might be thrown off. That would mean the end. He would freeze or starve to death, or be finished off by the guerrillas. He must not give up . . . he must hang on . . .

The train was returning from the front to the supply base, where in an hour or two it would arrive. There would be warmth. There would be a real train, with coaches, going back to Germany. . . .

The soldier counted the turns and, when he lost count, started again: "One, two, three . . ." The tears that sprang from his eyes made the piece of cloth that covered his face freeze to his cheeks. . . .

Half losing consciousness intermittently, bits of recollection flashed through the soldier's aching head. He heard again the cursing of the comrade with whom he had been thrown by the force of an explosion into a shell crater. The comrade had cursed like mad. After more than a year and a half on that damned Russian front he had got a furlough at last. On his way back the Russians broke through and cut him off. He had only one thought: to survive, to be



rescued by the counterattack, and to go on his furlough. So he had dug himself in, working hard against the frozen ground, cursing and swearing.

That must have been three or four days ago. The soldier on the train was not sure any more. But he remembered how the swearing had got on his nerves. He had told the comrade to shut up, but the other went right on swearing—at the war, at the commander of the regiment, and even at the Fuehrer. He called him a “beer-hall general” who was leading the army to defeat. “Shut up or you’ll never go on that furlough,” the soldier remembered shouting as he pointed his pistol at the comrade’s head. The other whipped out his pistol too, but not quickly enough. A single shot—and his big mouth was shut forever.

That must have been three or four days ago. The soldier felt no remorse at having killed his comrade. Orders were to shoot grumblers on the spot. It was his duty; and he despised grumblers. Besides, that comrade was by no means the first man on whom he had pulled a trigger. No, there was no remorse; it was only that the comrade happened to be a German soldier and wore the Iron Cross first class like himself. And from his look as he slowly settled back in the hole he had been digging, it was clear that in his last moments he must have realized that he would never go on furlough.

The soldier remembered that he had then merely sat there, after the killing, a little sick at his stomach, and indifferent as to whether he remained alive or was killed. He simply waited for his end. Only when the Russian artillery ceased firing had he come to and looked around.

In his present agony, the man smiled. He felt again briefly the warmth which the fur jacket had at first given him—a large woman’s fur jacket which the dead comrade had been wearing. And without the second pair of heavy mittens he could never have held on to that iron bar. He had carefully ransacked the dead man’s pockets and taken everything that could be of use. That, too, was accord-

ing to general orders. That was how he happened to find his comrade's furlough paper.

The soldier on the train remembered holding that piece of paper in his hands, thinking nothing . . . only that from that moment he again wanted to live! At that recollection he took a firmer grip and braced himself more securely against the end bar to keep his balance. He saw himself exchange the dead comrade's identification mark with his own and then everything else contained in their respective pockets. The one thing from which he could not part was the picture of Leni, his girl. Now he carried two pictures in the inner pocket over his heart—one of the dead man's girl and one of his own.

With that thought he again became aware that now he also had two names. If only he could forget the old one and become someone else! The notion lightened his heart for one moment, but in the next he felt still more miserable. To begin a new life—it was a dream from which he had awakened too often. There was no escape. And with the sudden sharp regret over what he had done, fear struck his heart—a kind of fear he had never known before, though he had dealt it out to others many a time.

In his state of exhaustion, between spells of nothingness and the wakening lashes of the biting cold, he imagined the face of an SS guard watching him steal the furlough paper and exchange the identification marks. He saw the brutal face, which more and more took on his own features, in the light of the locomotive far ahead; and the face became bigger and brighter with each turn of the train to right and to left, and then a whole company of SS guards in their black, spotless uniforms seemed to line up to confront him as a deserter. And he did not dare to go on and face them. He relaxed his grip on the bars and wanted to be thrown off—to freeze or starve to death, or be finished by the Russian guerrillas—whatever end it might be, only let it be the end.

But he was not thrown off. It took time before he real-

ized that the train had stopped, that they had arrived at the station. In the distance ahead where the flash of the locomotive had become fixed, the outlines of barracks slowly took shape; lighted windows seemed to come toward him, the sound of soldiers drinking behind them, and the melody of the soldier song, *Lilli Marlene*, played on a concertina.

At the door of the station canteen two SS guards checked the papers of the arriving soldiers. There were only a few of them, and before Hans knew it he was standing between the guards and pulling out the furlough pass. One guard glanced over it and gave it back to him with a "Happy furlough, comrade." A little later, inside, someone remarked: "They must have had orders to behave decently." Or was it he himself thinking that? He did not know.

He had stepped up with all the others to the counter where a hot drink was being handed out. Behind the counter, on the rough wooden boards of the wall, hung a big mirror in an elaborate gold frame. Hans wondered how the piece came to be there. And he could not find his own face among those reflected in it. Only when he shook his head, and a head in the mirror did the same, did he realize which one was his. But he still did not recognize himself after pulling off the shawl that covered his head and face. And slowly he thought: Nobody will recognize me. For the first time he felt safe.

The drink was hot tea with rum. Drinking it was at first like tasting with one's whole mouth the smell of strange flowers. It was a surprise, like the elaborate mirror. Afterwards one tasted only the hotness. . . .

The soldiers on furlough had to wait till the following night for the train that was to take them back to Germany. They were tipsy from the tea and rum, the unaccustomed warmth took the last ounce of energy out of them, and they slept most of the time. Hans woke up again and again, shaken by dreams of fear in which he was found out and beaten terribly or shot. Always then he looked into the mir-

ror and smiled. Nobody would recognize him. Nobody.

The train that finally came did not live up to his expectations. He had pictured it rolling into the station with all the windows lighted as he remembered the evening train arriving at the station back home. But now there were neither lights nor windows. It was a freight train, cold and dirty. The soldiers were herded together like sheep; again they froze to the bone. When the train pulled out westward, away from the front, there was a moment in the darkness as if everyone were holding his breath. And then the little fellow with the concertina started to play, and they all sang:

There is a little lantern  
Near the barracks' wall,  
Where we used to stand  
Before the bugle's call;  
If it still hangs there  
Where it used to be,  
I'll be there again  
And you'll be with me . . .  
Lilli Marlene,  
Lilli Marlene.

They sang until one after another fell asleep.

They traveled for three days before reaching Berlin. At the old frontier between Germany and Poland their journey was interrupted. All soldiers on their way to Germany had to pass through a sanitary station where they were thoroughly checked over for contagious diseases. Their uniforms were taken away to be cleaned and deloused, while they waited naked around a red-hot stove, half freezing, half burning. When they got their garments back—with the exception of extras such as the woman's fur jacket which Hans had taken from the dead comrade—everything smelled of chemicals. They also got back their few personal belongings for whose safety they had feared. Nothing was missing. Somebody made a joke about Hans's photos of two girls. It made him angry, but he restrained himself. For he

had two names also, and he could not permit himself to get into scrapes.

Before being ordered to board the waiting train—a real train this time—they had to line up and listen to a speech by an officer of the Waffen-SS. For military reasons they were not to tell anybody at home, not even their mothers, a word about the front. They were not to speak in a defeatist way about the hardships they had been through. To cause disquiet on the home front was tantamount to high treason and was punishable accordingly. After this speech they received a little package containing a sausage, half a pound of flour, and a lump of lard. Every soldier going on furlough got a package like that, on special orders from the Fuehrer, so that he could bring home a present.

When Hans received his package he recalled what the soldiers in his regiment carried when they returned after the short campaign in France two years ago: silk stockings, champagne, perfumes, food, and leather goods . . . what a life that had been! How things had changed! Every soldier now guarded his small package as if it contained treasures.

Only the little fellow with the concertina opened his as soon as they had sat down in the train compartment and stretched their legs with a feeling of sudden luxury. He ate what was edible and sold the rest for cigarettes. "I am from Cologne," he said apologetically. "My people at home are dead; killed in an air raid." He started to play his concertina again, but they hushed him up. They wanted to be silent and to think of getting home. The train pounded faster and faster through the dreary landscape. More and more it looked like home; one felt it from the familiar construction and colors of the churches and schoolhouses.

Hans also thought of going home. But all the time he knew that he could not. His parents and his girl lived in a little village up in the mountains at the former frontier between Germany and Czechoslovakia. The SS of the village would recognize him and quickly discover that he was carry-

ing another man's furlough paper. He could not go to Düsseldorf either, the home town of the dead comrade, for there the same thing would happen. Like the little fellow with the concertina, he had nowhere to go. And the faster the train thundered into Germany the more he realized the hopelessness of the whole undertaking.

In Berlin all soldiers holding furlough papers for the Rhineland were detained by SS guards and assembled in a waiting room. Hans thought they were looking for him. His heart stopped, and the little fellow with the concertina asked him if he was not feeling well. But they were assembled for an entirely different reason. An officer of the Waffen-SS told them that the Rhineland had been made into a restricted zone and that no one was permitted to go there any more. Why, they were not told; and a soldier who asked was cut short. They were advised to have a good rest in certain soldiers' homes, or, if possible, to visit relatives in other parts of Germany.

Hans was the only one who showed no disappointment. For him this regulation was a stroke of luck. His married sister lived in Dresden, a big city where nobody knew him. Once his paper was stamped at the railway station he would disappear. And his parents and Leni would come down from the village and visit him. Nobody need know how he had obtained his furlough. He was the first one to step forward from among the silent soldiers, saying that he wanted to visit his sister in Dresden. Then the name of that city was written into his paper as his new destination. Now he almost felt as if he were really on his own furlough.

Yet there was one thing that began to bother him. It was the idea of meeting his brother-in-law again. Karl was a narrow-chested, narrow-minded bookkeeper. The two had always despised each other. And when Hans had joined the National Socialist Party twelve years ago, Karl had thrown him out of his house. It would be hard to go to him now, but it was the only thing to be done.

Blackness and emptiness greeted Hans as he left the station. In the desolation of the front he had often thought of the capital of the Reich and wondered whether he would see it again. He remembered it as a city of life and lights. Now only a few dimmed street lamps were on, far apart from each other. A bus going to the station for Dresden trains was overcrowded. With a group of cursing soldiers he set out on foot, but quickly dropped behind. All of a sudden he was sick of soldiers' talk and company and wanted to be alone.

However, he was not allowed to be alone. Soon he was accosted by girls who seemed to creep up to him out of the darkness. He could hardly see them—only feel their hands touch him caressingly, and hear their voices. When the steps of a policeman or a military patrol became audible the girls disappeared instantly as if swallowed up by the night. Hans realized that they were after his food package, and he guarded it jealously. He intended to keep it as a present for his parents.

He refused, too, a girl with a very young, sweet voice. However, she kept walking at his side, enticing him, and he felt his resistance weakening; but he thought of Leni and felt that it would not be fair. Because he felt sorry for the girl he finally offered her some money to leave him alone. There was a moment of silence; then she laughed shrilly and said contemptuously: "Money! We have enough money, but there is nothing to buy. Money and hunger, and work, day and night, that we have!" She tried to tear away his food package, and he had to strike her hard before she let go. "Front swine," she cried, and spat in his face.

He listened to her steps running away. Then he slowly wiped his face clean. Funny—he was not even angry. He only thought of what a welcome that had been.

Hans slept on a bench at the railway station till early in the morning, when a train left for Dresden. The journey

took three times longer than before the war. In Dresden they stamped his pass and gave him ration cards for two weeks. Then he set out for the outskirts of the city where his sister and brother-in-law had a little house. But when he got there he did not find them. A minor party official now occupied the house, and no one could tell him where his brother-in-law had moved. He went back to town, had something to eat in a place for soldiers on furlough—a meal that left him half hungry—and then went to police headquarters, where, after hours of waiting, they finally gave him his relatives' new address.

It was getting dark when he arrived, at an apartment house in a workers' district. He had to climb five flights before he stood in front of the door with the name of his brother-in-law on a little card. No sound came from inside. He rang and rang before he heard steps approaching. A small, gray-haired woman, who looked as if she had just come out of a deep sleep, opened the door and asked sharply: "What do you want?"

Staring down into the woman's unhappy, irritable face he could not answer, for surprise. He who had learned to be hard and tough for so many years—never to be taken aback or moved by whatever happened—found himself unprepared for this: the woman was his own mother; and she did not recognize him.

"It's I, Mother! Hans!" he finally said. He noticed how pale she was, she who all her life had had the fresh complexion of the people of the mountains. Her eyes were red and tired as she looked at him mistrustfully.

"Yes, it's I, Mother; it's Hans."

The little woman slowly raised both her arms, hesitating, trembling, till a sudden flash of recognition enlivened her sad, sleepy expression. And she stepped forward, embracing her son, clinging to him, crying. She buried her head on his shoulder, but the next moment looked up again in bewilderment at the strong, strange face of the soldier who was



her child. "You are alive, Hansl, you are alive," she said, as if not believing it.

Suddenly she put her finger to her lips to silence him even before he was able to bring out a word. He was shocked to see how many years older his mother looked than when he had last seen her when he had left for the Russian front—eighteen months ago. He followed her silently as she took him into the apartment, closing the door with great care so as to make no noise. Then she showed him into a room to the left of a little corridor. A feeble electric bulb in the ceiling lighted the place. There was no furniture but an unmade bed just slept in, a dirty washstand, and a chair; yet there was scarcely room to turn around. Hans took it all in with one quick glance while his mother pressed him to sit down on the bed and seated herself opposite him on the chair.

"We have to speak softly," she said, listening. "Father must have his rest."

"You're here on a visit?" Hans asked. But he sensed that something was wrong.

His mother shook her head. After a pause she said, "No." Nothing else, but the way she said it stopped him from asking more. For a few moments they just sat looking at each other.

"It's good to see you again, Mother."

"I won't ask you to take your coat off." As his mother said this Hans noticed that she was shivering, not only from excitement but also because she was chilled through. There was no heat in the apartment. She must have been lying in bed dressed as she was. The woman's fur jacket which he had taken from the dead comrade would have come in handy now, he thought; and his astonishment grew at the filth of the room, which was so unlike his mother whose home had always been spick and span. "In my house one can eat from the floor," she had always said with pride. Now even she herself seemed untidy.

Hans took the blanket from the bed and put it around her

shoulders. Then he sat down again and waited for her to tell him what had happened.

"I've been too tired to clean up," she began, "too tired for days." And as she spoke her eyes had a tendency to close.

"Lie down, Mother. We can talk later," Hans urged.

"No, it was time to get up anyhow. We have to go to work."

"To work, you go to work! What are you talking about?"

"We have to work, Hansl." His mother answered softly, looking at him with her red, inflamed eyes. "We all have to work for the war; Father, and I, and everybody."

He got to his feet. She pulled the blanket closer around her shoulders with trembling fingers. He simply stared at her. Often, amid the dread of battle, his thoughts had gone to her. He had thought of himself as a little boy, burying his face in her white apron and feeling her hand moving consolingly and caressingly through his hair. This old woman before him was no more his mother than this filthy room was his father's house.

A factory siren shrieked in the distance and made the window panes rattle. It had grown pitch dark outside.

His mother rose quickly as if in fright and threw the blanket onto the bed. "Good heavens, I have to wake Father," she exclaimed, leaving the room hurriedly. Her little steps were still the same.

Hans followed her across the narrow corridor into another small room, in a similar condition and furnished as poorly. Only here, in addition to the bed, chair, and washstand, there was a little desk and bookshelf. And in contrast to the general disorder, the things on the desk—writing paper, a few folders, an ink bottle, a pen and a pencil—were very neatly arranged. And the gold titles on the backs of the books gleamed as if new or freshly dusted.

A frail man who had been asleep in his clothes was getting up. "Yes, Mother," he said, bending down for his shoes, straightening up a bit, turning to the table for his glasses,

putting them on meticulously and bending down again. Still the pedantic schoolmaster, Hans thought, noticing how white his father's hair had grown. It was disheveled and fell in long strands over his sharp and bony face. The head reminded him of the mad king in a classical play to which his father had taken him many years ago . . . he could not remember the title. The memory of it flashed through his mind while he heard his mother say: "Look, Father, who has come back!"

The old man, as if not hearing, went on lacing his shoes. Then suddenly he straightened himself and glanced over the rim of his glasses. He looked at his son long and coldly, not betraying the slightest emotion. This was the way he had always looked at him in childhood times, long past, when Hans had stood before him awaiting the announcement of his punishment for some misdeed.

Hans expected his father, who was fond of proverbs, to say, "A bad penny always turns up." But he said nothing. His father's pale lips moved, but not a word came from them. And in his eyes was a strange, unsteady flicker. It reminded Hans once more of the mad king whose name he could not remember—the king had looked at his wicked daughters in just that way.

"I've brought you both a present," said Hans, holding out the food package which he had held in his hands all this time as if he still had to defend it.

It was obvious that his parents knew what the parcel contained; they must have seen similar ones in the hands of other soldiers coming home. They devoured it with hungry eyes. It was embarrassing to watch them. Then something unexpected happened. His parents looked sharply at each other, and, after a moment, the old man solemnly shook his disheveled head. And the first words the father spoke to the son who had come from so far out of the bloody war were: "Keep it. We won't have any part of it." Meanwhile, Hans's

mother had become very tense, turning her head in alarm as if to listen for someone coming, fear in her eyes.

Bitterness rose in the son's heart. All the way home he had resisted the temptation to eat the sausage. He could have had a good time in exchange for it with that girl in Berlin. He had felt the satisfaction of self-discipline, the pleasure of doing something decent, and he had tasted in advance the joy his parents would have in his present. Their refusal to accept it deepened the disappointment which he had felt even before he entered this miserable place to find his parents in such horrible circumstances. An unhappy feeling had grown on him continually during the train ride homeward, in the dark streets at night and the gray drabness of daytime. He had not seen anyone smile since coming back to Germany. And yet he had been looking forward to life again as only a soldier can who has escaped the horrors of the front. . . .

"What's going on?" Hans asked, and went on in bewilderment without waiting for an answer. "What are you doing here in this filthy place? Where is Bertha and that husband of hers? Why aren't you up at our house in the village? Won't you tell me what's happened?"

The father took his overcoat from the bed, where he had used it as a second blanket, and put it on. There was a moment of silence, accentuated by the dripping of a faucet somewhere behind the thin walls. Then the father looked at his son. As he began to speak the mother put a restraining hand on his arm, but the voice was unexcited, every word was spoken on an even level, as in reading from a book, or lecturing.

"I thought you would know," he began. "Tomorrow we conquer the world, as you always liked to sing. We on the home front are fighting like you in the field. No one who can work is permitted to stay idle. Whoever cannot be a soldier or a worker has no right to live. Your mother and I

are doing our duty in the ammunition factory down the street. And as we are on the night shift, we will not be able to entertain you."

He paused for a moment and took a step nearer to his son, but did not change his tone: "Your friends of the party put us to work. They took our house, too. Karl and Bertha allow us to sleep in their beds while they work on the day shift. This place may be filthy but it is still a roof over our heads. And we are thankful not to have to stay in one of the barracks. Here I can even keep the few books I managed to take along." He paused and glanced at the gleaming volumes on the shelf. Then, as if belatedly aware that he had finished his speech, he stretched out his arm and said curtly: "*Heil Hitler!*"

Coming from his father, who once had forbidden the mention of the Fuehrer's name in his presence, Hans felt this "*Heil Hitler*" sting him like the nasty spit of the hungry girl in Berlin. And again he felt no anger, rather pain, or whatever it was that filled his desolate heart. It was beyond anything he had ever felt before. If only he could cry, like his mother. He saw the tears running down her cheeks as she passed him on the arm of his father, who led her out of the room, his disheveled head carried proudly, staring into an imaginary distance.

The wooden soles of his parents' shoes clattered on the planks of the corridor; the apartment door fell shut.

For quite a while Hans was unable to move. He sat in the little room staring at his father's books, listening unconsciously to the dripping in the sink behind the wall. It became louder with every drop till it thundered in his ears like so many explosions following each other at regular intervals. And he half thought it would have been better if he had been killed in that shell hole. In death he might have remembered his parents as he had always known them. Not like this.

Pulling himself together Hans went back to the room where his mother had first taken him. He turned on the light and looked at the place as if inspecting his squad quarters. And as there was no one whom he could order to clean it up, he decided to do it himself. He took off his coat and went into the kitchen for soap and water. A pile of dirty dishes filled the dripping sink. There was no warm water and he could find no soap. He searched for it everywhere. He opened a door at the end of the corridor which led into a much larger room than the others. A picture of the Fuehrer, a huge swastika, and the paraphernalia of the Hitler Youth adorned the walls. That's Herbert's room; the boy has the best, Hans thought, wondering how he had managed to forget his little nephew so completely. He figured out that the boy must be twelve or thirteen by now. But there was no soap beside his washbowl either. Not a piece of soap in the entire house. . . .

He did without it. The beds were made in the two little rooms, which he dusted, and the filth had disappeared from the floors when his sister and her husband came home. He was in the kitchen finishing the dishes when he heard them. He stepped out to the corridor to greet them. They did not seem surprised to find him in the apartment; they merely looked at him. He, too, was unable to say a word—he had had such a different picture of them. If he had met them on the street he would not have recognized them.

"Good evening, Hans," his sister finally said. "Mother told us you were here. We had supper with her and Father at the plant." She appeared embarrassed.

"Good evening," said Karl.

"Good evening," answered Hans.

Another pause; then Bertha said: "I have to sit down."

They went into Herbert's room. Bertha and Karl both seemed exhausted. They did not take off their coats, and Hans put his on again.

"Herbert is on a training march; I hope he will come

home soon," Bertha said. "You can stay here, Hans, only we have no bed for you, and all the sheets and blankets are gone."

There was a queer smile on her face as she said this—expressing a mock pride at having given up their last possessions for the war, and a not too serious regret at being unable to offer any greater hospitality. Hans was about to say that he would stay somewhere else when Karl asked: "How long is your furlough?"

"In two weeks I have to go back."

"Which front?"

"Russian."

Again there was a pause. Bertha wore her hair differently, Hans noticed, parted in the middle, brushed back, and tied into a knot at the neck. No curls any more. She resembled Grandmother in the picture that had always stood on the piano up in the village. Karl, too, had changed a lot. He had lost his bookkeeperish appearance. He no longer wore glasses and moved now like a workingman. Only the expression with which he had come out of the concentration camp, back in 1937, had not quite disappeared; he constantly seemed to be looking somewhere else, or to be listening for something.

"How is it that Father and Mother have to work?" Hans asked.

"Total mobilization," answered Karl, as if the two words accounted for everything. His eyes were blank as he looked at Hans. But this much was clear: the old hatred between them was still alive.

Bertha looked up and added: "All the people have been moved from the village down here. They are all working in the plant."

"Leni too?" Hans asked excitedly. "Then I can see her——" He fell silent as he saw the glance that passed between Bertha and Karl.

"Yes, Leni is also working at the plant, on the night shift," Bertha said. "Are you still in love with her?"

He did not answer right away. He had a feeling that something was wrong. Perhaps Leni did not love him any more. He would not be the first furlougher to come home and find his girl unfaithful. The front was full of stories about the Sodom and Gomorrah at home. Going to bed with an SS man, or even a foreign worker, was the only fun a girl could still have. All this flashed through Hans's mind while he watched Karl and Bertha, who seemed to be growing more and more ill at ease.

"Why do you ask me that?" he finally said. "Do you think I found a bride at the front?" And leaning forward he continued: "Or is Leni going with someone else?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Don't you see her?"

"When?" asked Karl. "She works on the night shift, we on the day shift. We are dead when she comes to work. We don't see anybody. Work and sleep—that's our life."

Hans felt relieved and uncomfortable at the same time. He had the feeling that they were keeping something from him, but he could not put his finger on it. "Where is Leni living?" he asked.

"At the barracks."

"She is at work now?"

"Yes, till eight in the morning."

Hans got up, putting on his pistol belt.

"You can't see her now," Bertha said.

"Why not?"

"No visitors are allowed during working time."

"You mean to say that I come all the way from Russia after two years at the front and I can't see my girl?"

"Exactly," said Karl, and Hans hated him for it. "The SS won't let you in. They will order you away and if you say a word you are in trouble."



"I can give you a bit of advice," said Bertha hesitatingly. "At midnight there is a ten-minute recess. If the guard is good-natured, and you have a few cigarettes to spare, he may call her out for a moment."

"Yes, to bribe them is the only way," Karl added, falling silent at a glance from his wife.

Hans looked at his wrist-watch. It was just past nine. He suppressed the impotent anger that had risen in him. He had waited so long to be with Leni, he could wait three hours more. And in no case could he afford to get into trouble with the SS. He had to move differently now from what he was accustomed to—more carefully and more slyly.

"I'll try to see her at midnight," he said and sat down again.

Only now, as they relaxed, did Hans and Karl notice that Bertha was pressing both her hands against her body and biting her lips. Karl instantly got up and helped her to Herbert's bed.

"What's wrong?" Hans asked, slowly getting to his feet too.

After a pause Karl answered sullenly, grinding his teeth: "They are killing her."

Bertha waved a frightened hand and tried to get up. But Karl held her down, wiped her forehead, and stroked her hair caressingly.

For a while there was neither movement nor sound in the room. Bertha had closed her eyes and, save for an almost imperceptible twitching of her lips, lay motionless. Karl stared down at her helplessly. From outside the sound of a passing train, its whistle shrieking, came sharply into the room, then faded away again.

Finally Bertha's face relaxed.

"What does the doctor say?" Hans asked.

"There are no doctors," Karl answered, looking at him accusingly; "only medical students and quacks. They don't

know anything; and they don't dare pronounce anyone sick, anyway."

"Don't talk like that," Bertha said; she sat up quickly, as if impelled by fear. The attack seemed to be over. Only her greenish pallor remained. "Pull yourself together, Karl," she continued sharply. "I am all right." And as if to prove it she got up and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed Hans asked: "What's wrong with Bertha? Who is killing her?"

"Everything; everybody," Karl answered. "She doesn't have the right nourishment. She cannot stand the work, day in, day out, for months without a day off. She worries about Herbert. That boy cares less and less for us. Not a human word comes out of him. And your father and mother—the work is killing them too. . . ."

"Why are they on the night shift?"

"Because old people are supposed to need less sleep."

For a while that answer rang in the cold air of the room. Then Hans heard himself say, "We are all fighting for our lives," though he did not mean to say it, or to argue.

Karl opened his mouth, as if he were about to say something, but closed it quickly again, his grimy hands moving in a hopeless, dismal gesture.

"You still have a roof over your head." Hans thought of the many months he had lived in the open through the terrible Russian winters. And only now did he realize how often he had given up hope of ever coming back—only now, while he sat alive between these four unshattered walls, the Russians and their cold far away. Things were not exactly as he had imagined them, but still these people at home had no right to complain. Only the soldiers at the front knew what war really was.

While this reflection went slowly through his mind he again saw the cursing comrade flop back into the hole he had dug for himself. But Hans was not going to have this

hard-gotten furlough, for which he was risking so much, spoiled; no, not by the memory of that grumbler, nor by the misery he had found here. To have qualms was stupid and cowardly. Only weak people had qualms. What's done is done. Never look back. Forward! What if the comrade had shot him? One soldier would be on furlough and one dead. It made no difference to the army which was which.

Hans was pleased with this argument. He stretched his legs lazily and enjoyed the change to shelter and security. And, half yawningly, he said: "It's child's play what you are going through. You would sing a different tune after a few days in Russia. You live in paradise compared to us out there."

Karl did not react immediately to these words. He sat still on the bed, tired and sleepy. A moment of dreary silence passed. But suddenly he got up, stepped opposite Hans and pressed his hands upon the table. Bending forward, he said with an effort, and in a voice that sounded hoarse: "It's humiliating to look on helplessly while they kill your wife and turn your child into a killer."

He had not said, "into a killer like you," but Hans felt as if he had. He felt as if for the third time since his return to the Fatherland he had been hit squarely across the face. And his muscles became tense and the blood rushed to his head. But he kept himself under control. He only glared at Karl in that cold way that used to turn even his squad at the front, those "sixteen devils," into a bunch of frightened little children.

It had a different effect on Karl. A smile came into his face, a weary, sad smile. "You can't frighten me," he said. "I'm finished, finished forever. But I have not changed in my heart. Remember what I told you when I saw you last? That your party would ruin Germany?"

He paused and shook his head. Then he stepped back, and continued, as if to himself: "Yes, that much I knew then. But I did not foresee the half of it; no, not a tenth,

not a hundredth. Nobody did. That is our guilt and our excuse, if there can be any excuse. . . .”

“At the front we shoot people for such talk,” Hans said quietly.

“Your friend Meissner shoots people here for less,” Karl answered, and sat down again on the bed, half collapsing in his fatigue.

The name Meissner went through Hans like a stab. For Meissner had been his leader back in the wild days when the party first sought to conquer Germany; Meissner would tear him to pieces now if he found out how he had managed to come back from the front. With him Hans had taken the oath when he joined the party and the stormtroopers. Fear and shame took hold of him, but he hid his feelings and said quickly: “Meissner, he’s here?”

“Yes, he is here. He is SS commander of our district. He is a captain now.” Getting up, Karl came around the table and continued in a different, pleading tone: “You could put in a word for us with Meissner. He still sends his people around to bother us. They wake us up in the middle of the night to check on whether we listen to foreign broadcasts. I smashed our radio, but they still keep coming. All that is making a wreck out of Bertha.”

At this moment Bertha came back carrying the food package, which Hans had thrown on his father’s desk. “Mother cleaned up again, and I told her I would do it tonight,” she said.

Hans remained silent.

Bertha, turning toward him and then looking at the package, continued: “To whom will you give it?”

“I gave it to Father and Mother, but they refused to take it.”

“I thought so,” said Bertha. Then she paused.

Hans had decided to give the parcel to Leni. But now he could not admit it. Karl, too, was looking at the package as if hypnotized by it.

"You can have it," Hans said.

Both Karl and Bertha unwrapped the package with eagerness. It was not quite undone when the door opened and their son, Herbert, appeared in the doorway. No one had heard him coming. Red-faced from the cold, but obviously dead tired, his eyes sunken in like an old man's, he supported himself by the door knob. But on seeing Hans he snapped to attention. And only after he was given his "At ease" did he run up to his uncle and shake hands with him.

"Uncle, you are back!" he cried out, and his weariness seemed to leave him. "And you have the Iron Cross first class and you are a sergeant. We thought you were dead." Joy and pride were all over the child's face. And he added, as if quoting someone: "The German army will live, live forever."

"It surely will," agreed Karl, suddenly standing up. "Three cheers for Hans." Bertha left the unpacking of the parcel and got up too. All three shouted: "*Hans—heil! Hans—heil! Hans—heil!*"

They are afraid of the boy, Hans thought.

"You must tell me all about the front," the boy begged, and, as if quoting, he continued: "We are beating the enemy in the most gigantic defensive battles ever fought in world history. The fortress of Europe will never fall. In the Hitler Youth we follow the war day by day on our maps. How are your secret weapons working? You must tell me, Uncle, if it is not a military secret."

"It is, Herbert," Hans answered, and to console the boy he wanted to add that he would tell him many other things. But it was not necessary. Herbert's eyes, opening wide, were turned on the thick sausage that his parents were pulling out of the package.

After they had all shared half of the sausage, Hans got up to leave. Though it was only ten o'clock, he did not want to keep the others from sleep any longer, for they could not

keep their eyes open. Herbert held on to his hero uncle, who had to assure him that he would return and tell him more about the front. "I'll sleep on the floor, you take my bed," the boy said proudly, and his parents did not dare to contradict him.

Bertha warned Hans not to lose his temper with the guards at the plant. "Bribe them with cigarettes," Karl advised him. Again Hans had the impression that the two were holding something back, but he left without saying a word about it.

He still had two hours till the midnight recess, but he went straight to the plant to reconnoiter. He told the reluctant guard at the entrance what he wanted—the last package of cigarettes worked wonders. The man promised to call Leni out for a moment at the midnight break. "But now you'd better disappear," he added.

Hans wandered through the darkened, empty streets, looking in vain for a place where he could have a drink, until he almost ran into an SS patrol that with the aid of a flashlight made two workers show their identification papers and submit to searching. Upon seeing this Hans quickly disappeared behind a pile of old bricks that filled an empty lot. The less contact he had with the SS the better.

It was a long wait in the cold and windy night. The silence was suddenly broken by the roar of fighter planes rising from a near-by airfield and shooting north. Then it was very still again. But soon flashes of light brightened the distant sky, and the faint sound of flak firing was carried by the wind.

Odd, that his first day at home should come to such an end—he cringing behind a pile of bricks as he had done so often in Russia, the sound and fire of war in the sky. It was almost like being back at the front, except that out there he had had silly dreams about home. . . .

Punctually at midnight he was back at the plant entrance, but the guard who had taken his last cigarettes was not

there, and Leni did not come out. So Hans spoke to two other SS men who merely shook their heads until one of them, at Hans's pleading, reported his request to an officer who stood, with legs apart, in the middle of the wide yard behind the factory fence. From the man's gestures Hans sensed that the answer was no, as indeed it was. "Nothing doing," said one guard. And the other added: "What do you want of her now? She goes to bed in the morning." And both guards laughed, while Hans turned away, clenching his fists in the pockets of his coat.

Avoiding the SS patrol, sneaking through the darkness, crossing streets quickly, he went back to the apartment. He found Herbert fast asleep on the floor, under the big swastika. As he lifted him into bed, the boy fastened his arms around him and whispered: "I must be on time, Mother . . . on time."

Hans remained awake for a long time; covered with his coat he lay on the hard floor, as he had often lain on the frozen earth in Russia. He thought back into the past and forward into the future. He thought of his parents; of the degrading surroundings in which he had found them; and he thought of Leni and wondered what it was that Karl and Bertha were holding back from him.

They had asked him whether he was still in love with her, but no one had said that Leni had been longing for him, or that she would be happy to have him back.

And what Hans really thought and felt, deep in his heart, was that he should never have returned. With clarity there dawned on him what he had vaguely sensed during the retreat in Russia: that in this war the best thing for a German soldier was to die on the battlefield.

## I I

LENI got word of Hans's return during the night shift. The guards had just blown their whistles announcing the end of the brief mid-shift recess, a moment that Leni dreaded each night. The shrill notes, echoing a hundred times from the walls and roof of the vast hall, went through and through her. Covering her ears with her hands, she was stepping back into her place on the assembly line when Hans's mother suddenly appeared beside her.

Instantly Leni knew that something unusual must have happened. Otherwise the old woman, who worked at the other end of the hall, would never have dared to come so far down the line and risk being late for the resumption of work. Moreover, it was against the rules, and unwise as well, for friends must keep away from one another, or the Gestapo might become interested in them.

The old woman, looking up at Leni with frightened eyes, said as if in warning: "Hans has come back." Then she turned quickly and bustled away between the two rows of old people bending over their work, just as the foreman at the other end started shouting for her.

Leni's job was to check machine-gun ammunition belts that passed before her. On the near side of the belts the brass shell bases moved by like an endless stream of gold-pieces. On the other side, sticking out of the loops of rough fabric, the bullet tips moved. Their sharp, bluish-black points always reminded Leni of the beaks of mountain ravens. Sometimes a cartridge was missing and then, from a box beside her, she would stuff one into the empty loop. Or perhaps a cartridge was not properly in place, because the old fingers doing the stuffing had been too slow or too tired. Then Leni would correct the fault with a quick push



of her right thumb. But most of her work was done with the eyes. A sharp glance over the oncoming belts and she would detect the smallest mistake and prepare to correct it. Alert, untiring eyes were needed for this work, and that was why all the checkers in the plant were young girls and why the best of them worked on the inefficient night shift manned by the old.

"Hans has come back!"

Leni repeated the message to herself as the belts in front of her began to move again; her eyes went on the lookout, and the calloused thumb of her right hand was fixed in readiness.

"Hans has come back! Hans has come back!"

She could think of nothing else. Her knees were shaking; her heart was pounding in her throat; she felt the blood rushing into her face. Her neighbor, once an actress at the Dresden National Theater, who had lived in retirement in the home village, elbowed Leni gently to make her notice an empty loop that she had overlooked.

The hours dragged on endlessly in the vast hall which had once been the sports arena of the Dresden workers. The seats of the amphitheater had been ripped out, so that the bare cement platforms, like broad steps, rose up all around. Upon them huge lights were placed to illuminate the hall. There too the guards walked to and fro, or stood near the warmth of the lights, watching the workers and signaling the foremen when they observed any break in the rhythm of the work.

As a factory the place was an improvisation. The real ammunition plant producing the machine-gun bullets was across the street. In former years the ammunition belts had been stuffed there automatically, but in the third year of the war a lack of machine oil made that impossible; then, to make things worse, spare parts stopped coming. Finally the machines broke down. It was then that the stuffing by

hand had been organized and a few hundred Jews and war prisoners brought in to do the job.

Some of these were still on every shift, rigidly separated from the other workers. But the bulk of them had been sent away to heavier labor, or forced into the foreign legions to fight along with the Germans, after the abandonment of Stalingrad, when the new total mobilization orders were put into effect. The Jews and the war prisoners were replaced by persons from walks of life deemed nonessential to the war effort. Former shopkeepers, journalists, artisans, barbers, and actors; the old, the retired, and the sick had been rounded up for the task.

There were over a thousand such workers on every shift. Torn from their former way of life, suffering under the strain of unaccustomed work, their state of mind was none too pleasant. But they were kept under severe discipline. Captain Meissner of the district SS had even forbidden conversation during working hours.

Save for the whistles of the guards or the shouting of a foreman, no sound was heard in the arena. Once every two hours, however, the hall was filled with the rolling thunder of the little cars that brought the bullets from the ammunition plant. Then, too, an icy draft swept the arena till the huge doors closed and silence again prevailed.

"Why are you crying, Leni?" whispered the old actress, stealthily rubbing her cold fingers, which she still succeeded in manicuring after a fashion.

The question made Leni conscious of the tears running down her cheeks to drop on the passing goldpieces, shell bases, and raven-beak bullet tips and be carried off by them. She did not answer. She bent forward and stuffed a cartridge into an empty loop, dried her eyes with the sleeve of her sweater, and glanced sharply over the oncoming belts.

"Attention, tempo going up!"

The hollow voice of the loudspeaker bellowed the an-

nouncement, and a moment later the belts began to move faster. And many thousands of fingers began to move faster too, and many backs bent still more, and the deep silence became still deeper.

Not long afterward someone collapsed in the segregated lines where the war prisoners and the Jews were working. That happened every night. It came with a noise that had grown familiar—the dull thud of a body. Then followed the sounds of the running steps of the guards, and the scrambling and shouts as they forced the man or woman to stand up again.

It was a woman this time. One could tell from the yell of pain that suddenly pierced the air to be echoed by the walls and roof and fade out quickly. The guards must have hit her, though no one had seen it because no one dared to look. The heads of the German workers were bent ever deeper over their work.

And Leni, still thinking "Hans has come back," began to pray with silent lips:

Lord have mercy upon us,  
Christ have mercy upon us,  
Lord have mercy upon us . . .

Checking on the oncoming belts, Leni saw the lips of the old actress move in the same prayer. For a split second the actress raised her head and they exchanged a glance of understanding. And Leni said, her eyes wide open: "I cry because I'm afraid—I'm afraid."

The loudspeakers boomed again and the belts began to move faster still. The doors at the end of the hall opened, and the thunder of the inrolling cars heaped with bullets filled the arena, and the icy draft swept through it, buffeting and swaying the old people. They ached and creaked, like the gaunt old mountain forests on that unforgotten winter night when the people of the village were forced to leave their homes.

The hours dragged on endlessly. Tired, bloodshot eyes looked up more and more often to the big glass windows in the roof, as if they sought to penetrate the blackout paint and see the first gray of dawn.

Leni did not notice how slowly the time passed. She did her work mechanically, her innermost self far away. Not merely on this night when the news of Hans's return had blotted out everything else—she had never wholly taken part in the dreary successions of everyday life. It often seemed to her as if she were two persons—one of them not accepting anything real, not even the war. It would often happen that without knowing it she would suddenly smile, or even laugh out loud, in the midst of the nightmare that surrounded her. And only the old actress beside her would know and understand.

Leni had known Hans ever since she had been aware of anything at all. He had been the bad boy of the village, and his being the son of the stern schoolteacher had only added to his reputation among the other children. The grown-ups speculated on how far an apple might fall from the tree, and their little daughters and sons overheard their criticisms with secret admiration for the evil-doer.

Leni was still playing with her first doll when Hans was already the leader of a tough gang of boys. They called him *Schinder Hannes*, after the hero-robber of the story who, in daring exploits, took from the rich and gave to the poor. A boy who wanted to join the gang had to undergo a series of tests: he had to jump without hesitation from the highest rock into the water hole; he had to scale the wire fences of the large estate without fear of the watch dogs, or of hurting himself or tearing his trousers. The most severe, final test, however, took place at secret initiation rites which were performed under a full moon in the huge quarry outside the village. Wild rumors were in circulation among the children about the climax of the ceremony, "the cutting of the cross." The truth was that the leader of the gang

slowly cut a cross with his pocket knife into the back of the left thumb of the candidate, between the two knuckles. If the candidate showed the slightest sign of pain, if he shuddered or jerked his hand, he could never become a member of the *Schinder Hannes* gang.

Since Hans's mother had told Leni of his return, that awesome night on which she had witnessed the secret initiation ceremonies of a new member of the gang was again present in her mind. And it seemed to her again, though she had been fighting this thought for a long time, that on that night her entire life had acquired a definite course. She was only nine at the time; Hans almost fifteen.

She had hidden in one of the big carts standing so silently in the quarry. Peering between the planks and shivering with excitement, she saw the blade of the pocket knife catch the moonlight. And when the boys dispersed, disappearing into the shadows of rock and forest, only Hans remained, standing erect and looking up at the firmament, motionless, as if talking to the infinite night, to the moon and stars, until suddenly he pressed both hands to his face as if something were wrong with him.

Leni could still recall the pathetic gesture that had touched her heart so deeply. Then he had flung his head back, very proudly and defiantly, and walked away over the bottom of the quarry, the little stones crunching under his quick steps.

She remembered very clearly wanting to run after him, to grasp his hand and walk beside him, or even behind him. Not daring to breathe, she felt that her desire to be near him was a deadly sin. But that night, stealing home in great fear through the vast silence, she had made herself a secret follower of the *Schinder Hannes*. By the flickering light of a candle in her room she cut the cross into her left thumb with the blade of a scissors, neither shivering nor jerking her hand, regardless of the hurt. And a sweetness such as she

had never felt before filled her body and soul and kept her awake till sunrise.

Now, as Leni raised her left thumb to her eyes and bent the knuckles, she could still discern on the tightened skin the faint scars of the two white lines crossing each other.

"Watch out; six o'clock!" whispered the actress.

Six o'clock: that meant that the last, most painful two hours of the shift had begun. The warning whistles of the guards and the shouts of the foremen increased with the exhaustion of the crew. Leni felt no fatigue. She was wide awake in every sense and nerve. But her mind was not on the job. The old actress had to nudge her with her elbow again and again to make her notice the empty cartridge loops which she would have allowed to pass by.

Suddenly the shouting of the foremen and the whistling of the guards ceased as if cut off. But the tired fingers of the workers moved faster, as if reanimated, and everyone bent his head still more. Even the weariness seemed to disappear from their faces; at least they tried to appear deeply and happily concentrated on their work. No one lifted a head to look, but all knew that Captain Meissner had entered the arena. Hardly a week passed without his inspecting the shift, though it was never known when he might come.

Meissner was a bony, strongly built man in his thirties. His dark complexion matched in a sinister way his black uniform with the skull on the right sleeve. His elegant, highly polished boots marched out from under his long black coat with machine-like precision. It was so silent in the arena now that the sharp sound of his military steps came echoing back from the walls and the roof like whiplashes over the bowed heads. He stopped and gave someone a few encouraging words. He shouted at a guard for not having his uniform correctly buttoned. On other nights he would walk up one aisle and down the other without saying a single word, and as if seeing nobody and nothing.

Leni was thinking about the friendship that had once existed between Hans and Meissner, when the captain stopped to speak to a worker who had owned the general store in her village. This man had become a party member long before the Nazis came to power, because he had hated the big department store in Dresden where the villagers bought more and finer things for less money, in preference to the shabby wares of his shop. The Nazis had promised to close all department stores. But now his little shop was closed, and he was working on an assembly line, while the owner of the department store, who had secretly been a Nazi too, was an important man and his store the only one open in the entire town. The former storekeeper and his wife were often heard quarreling about their own stupidity. But now when Meissner talked to him, the pathetic old man bowed as if honored by the attention, and stretched out his arm and shouted, "*Heil Hitler!*" and bowed and shouted, sweat on his forehead, until the tall black uniform marched on. And Leni was kept busy filling the empty loops which the storekeeper had missed.

At eight o'clock to the second the day shift filed in. Relieving shift was a military procedure. Directed by commands over the loudspeaker, the workers of the incoming shift lined up behind the night workers, who kept at their task. When everyone of the day shift was in his place, the command, "One, two, three—change!" sounded. The night shift made a quick step to the left, and the day shift moved into their places, hands ready for the work which thus went on without interruption. For disturbing this procedure, or executing its maneuvers badly, the punishment was pushing bullet cars for from two to four hours in addition to one's regular work.

There was little spoken at the soup kitchens outside the arena where the day shift had had its morning soup and where the night shift took its meal before going to sleep. But the old actress, shivering in her moldy fur coat that

was not even good enough to be taken by the Winter Help Campaign, said to Leni, as they waited in line with their bowls: "What was the matter with you tonight?"

"Hans has come back," Leni answered after a while, her blue-gray eyes reflecting the color of the low, heavy sky.

"Hans? Who is he? Your lover?" Chattily the actress moved closer to her.

Leni watched Hans's parents. They had already eaten and were walking away, the little woman on the arm of the tall, crazy-looking man . . . always on his arm.

It took Hans some time to become fully awake that morning. Lying half asleep he dozed off again, thinking he was back at the Russian front. He heard the cursing of the comrade he had killed, but it was clear to him even in his sleep that he was far away from the front, and safe, and that nobody knew that he had shot the comrade and taken his furlough paper.

Then he dreamt of Leni. She stood before him as he always saw her in his thoughts—a childlike, red-cheeked girl with golden braids and blue ribbons bound into neat little bows like delicate butterflies. She smiled at him and the butterflies lifted their wings and flew toward him, growing bigger and bigger, and suddenly changing into huge black planes swooping down at him.

He sat up, awakened by the roar of a motorcycle whizzing through the street outside. Nothing moved in the apartment. Then he made out the sound of the dripping faucet, and the previous evening moved slowly back into his consciousness. Grasping his coat, which had served him as a blanket, he got to his feet.

He was scarcely upright when the door opened and his mother came in with a little tray. She must have been waiting outside for the first sign of his being up. "Good morning," she said, with a faint, doubtful smile.

Hans stared at her. She wore a shining white apron, as in



his childhood days. Altogether she was much tidier than on the evening before. Freshly combed, she looked almost as he had always remembered her. Except that she had grown so much older.

"Good morning, Mother."

Hans took the tray out of her hands and moved a chair for her. They sat down. Putting his cold hands around the steaming cup, he said: "It's like old times." He said it just to say something, and because he would have liked it to be like old times.

"But the coffee isn't the same," his mother answered, apologetically. "And there is no milk. Do you remember how you always liked the skin of the milk thick on your coffee?"

Hans remembered, and he drank the black hot water that tasted worse than the *ersatz* coffee they got at the front. And the bread was soggy and fell apart and became gluey in his mouth. Yet he ate it. He was hungry.

"Bertha and Karl told me you had a nice evening," his mother said timidly.

"Yes," he said.

"Karl is a good husband. Life is so difficult, but he never says a cross word to Bertha."

The way she said it, he knew his mother was afraid that he might fight with Karl as they did in the past, and wanted to forestall it.

He patted her hands. "Don't worry. I'll get along with him for the few days I am here."

His mother smiled, a real smile this time. But it disappeared as he looked straight at her, and asked: "What's wrong with Leni, Mother?"

"I don't think anything is wrong with her," the old woman answered quickly. It sounded as if she had expected the question and prepared her answer. Her flickering eyes betrayed an inner anxiety.

For a while he watched her hands that began to move

nervously. Her wedding ring was very loose. Then he looked up, sharply, questioningly.

"I don't know anything, Hansl," she said fearfully.

It was obvious that she too was trying to keep something from him.

"Is Leni going with someone else?" he asked again, as he had asked Bertha and Karl.

"No, Hans. She is a decent girl. Not like so many others. . . ."

"Then what is it?" he interrupted her. "You've got to tell me."

"But I don't know anything."

He felt his temper rising and saw his hand on the table turn into a fist. But he said quietly: "I've got to know, Mother; don't you understand, I've got to know."

She put her hand on his fist, hesitatingly, touching it very tenderly. "Don't get angry with me, Hansl, be good," she said softly. And then she looked at the door, as if she wanted to say something that no one, not even his father, ought to hear.

The next moment the door was slowly pushed open, and the old man appeared on the threshold. His tall, emaciated figure reached almost to the lintel of the door. He was reading one of his books, holding it close to his eyes with his right hand. In the other hand he carried two rolls of yellow material, bandages of some kind, pressing them against his ribs so as not to drop them.

Without looking up from his book the old man said: "It's time for you to go to bed, Mother." He was about to turn away, when Hans overcame his repugnance, got up and said: "Good morning, Father."

The old man turned back and looked over the rims of his glasses. It was not clear what it was that seemed to astonish him—the mere presence of his son, or his getting up and greeting him. Hans could not make it out. The old man seemed even more crazy to him than on the day before.

There was not the slightest intonation in the old man's voice as he said, very calmly: "I have just been reading about you and your kind." And again he raised the book close to his eyes and read aloud:

There will be only one flock then and one shepherd—one free shepherd with an iron staff, and a shorn-alike, bleating-alike human herd! Wild gloomy times are roaring toward us, and a prophet wishing to write a new apocalypse would have to invent entirely new beasts—beasts so terrible that St. John's older animal symbols would be like gentle doves and cupids in comparison. The gods are veiling their faces in pity on the children of man. . . .

As the old man fell silent his stare lost itself in an imaginary distance. But after a short pause he said: "That was written a hundred years ago. One hundred years ago—and it has all come to pass."

Only the frightened face of his mother had stopped Hans from flaring up. He sat down, and said as quietly as he could: "Go on hating me, Father. Go on calling me a beast. But we will smash your hypocritical world of words to bits, till nothing is left."

The old man did not answer. He closed the book and turned to his wife as if he had not even heard his son. "Come, Mother," he said, "we have to change your bandages." And he turned away and disappeared into the dark corridor.

The mother got up. Hans saw her relief that it had not come to a sharper clash. But her face was flushed and embarrassed, and as if apologizing for leaving Hans she said: "My legs are still swollen. They have to be bandaged, and Father does it for me every day." And she followed him hastily.

His mother's swollen legs . . . Hans remembered how frightened he had been when he saw them for the first time as a child. Later on he had heard that he was to blame. That had troubled his childish heart for a long time, till he had

grown old enough to understand that his mother had risen too early from childbed, because a poor schoolteacher's wife had no means of taking care of herself properly. Ever since he had hated the rich. . . . His mother's swollen legs . . . the thought made him even more angry. He got up, put on his cap, coat and holster belt, and left the apartment, slamming the door behind him.

Out in the street Hans opened his coat and breathed deeply. It seemed much warmer outside than in the dreary, smelly apartment. The air was mild, as if gently fanned down from the wide blue sky. It was one of those pre-spring days when body and soul feel the winter's burden beginning to lighten.

Hans looked down the broad, empty street. Now in daylight it seemed strangely familiar. But only when the big round roof of the workers' sports arena came into sight did he know why. It must have been in 1932, when the storm-troopers of Leipzig, to whom he belonged at that time, were ordered to Dresden as reinforcements to protect a party demonstration. They were brought from Leipzig in large limousines, private cars lent for the purpose by wealthy backers of the party. It was a very comfortable ride, ending in a good fight. Jumping out of the cars and attacking, with no questions asked, they battled the hostile workers into the sidestreets, clearing the way for the party. Afterwards they carried off whatever they wanted from the shops. How frightened they were, those little money-bags and profiteers—Jews and Aryans alike!

The stores were all still here, but their windows were empty now save for the posters, "Officially closed." Even the prominent beer garden at the corner was shut; so were the two barber shops. The street looked dead, almost like the streets in conquered Russian towns. This was a discouraging comparison, and it reminded him of his leaving the front with another man's furlough paper. No, it was not

pleasant to think of himself as a deserter—especially on this street, where he had won his spurs in the battle for the Third Reich.

A troop of Russian war prisoners came marching along the middle of the street. Hans watched them with a strange longing for the front. They were followed by Poles, easily recognizable by the huge "P" on their chests. The fuzzy tail of the column consisted of a handful of Jews, the yellow star of David on their torn clothes. Their faces were white as chalk. Hans felt no pity for any of them. Why should he? In two weeks he would be going back to the front to fight as never before. In a few weeks he might be shot, or reduced to a cripple and killed by the doctors in the field station if they thought he could not be mended into a fighter again, or if it involved too much trouble. No, he had no pity—not for himself and not for others.

Hans asked a policeman, an absurd old fellow who seemed frightened when spoken to, where the barracks were, and then marched on in that direction. He felt dirty and would have liked to be clean. He would have liked to get some flowers for Leni. And he regretted having given the food parcel away.

When he saw the low roofs of the barracks on the bank of the Elbe, he stood still. There she must be waiting for him now. The hour of which he had dreamt for so long was near. The pure joy of happy expectation seized him, but only for a moment. Why should Leni be any different from other girls? For more than two years he had been away; she must have changed a lot since he last saw her.

Walking on he brushed all that aside. He was not going to look for trouble. For these two weeks Leni would be for him just as he wanted her to be: the innocent girl who blushed and hung on his neck and whispered—"I have loved you since I was a child," but who would not go with him into the forest as the other girls did. Only this time

he would not take no for an answer. And if he should have to marry her . . .

To marry her! The moment Hans thought of it, he was struck by the realization that he could not marry her even if he wanted to, because that would mean presenting his false furlough paper. He wanted only to live, really live, for two weeks. But the SS would not understand that. It was not their job. To marry her! How beautiful it would have been to come to her now and say: "Leni, I have come back to marry you." How happy she would be!

Another voice in Hans started to mock these sentiments, a voice that always made him hard and angry and ruthless even toward himself. And he replaced the softness with the one thing he knew and really believed in: his strong will to get what he wanted. Instantly he felt more sure of himself. Only weaklings argued! Deeds alone counted! To embrace her, do with her as he pleased, and make her like it! That was the way to behave. All the longing fantasies that had tortured him for endless months at the front, and which were so near fulfillment now, made him walk faster and step unhesitatingly up to the guard at the entrance and ask where he could find Leni.

"Barrack 28," said the guard. Hans walked down a dreary, unpaved road between low buildings, each like the other. He entered a barren square where people were washing their laundry in a long cement trough. He had to cross the square, and in passing saw that he knew almost everyone there: the postmaster of the village and his hunchbacked daughter; the watchman of the big estate, who had so often let loose his dogs on him; the priest's fat cook (only she was not fat any more), and the shopkeeper and his wife, snapping at each other as always. Hans found particular satisfaction in seeing the couple in their present predicament. What a fuss they had made over his gang's theft of a barrel of apples out of their storeroom! But these two still seemed

very lively, while all the others moved silently and slowly, almost in a daze. The contrast between their drowsy movements and the fresh, sunny forenoon startled Hans, till he realized that these were night shift workers, and that it must be their bedtime. Leni was not among them.

Nobody took notice of him as he walked past them toward the gray barrack with the large black 28, on the other side of the square. He was still in the open when Leni came running out to meet him. She must have been waiting for him behind a window. He wanted to run toward her too, but something held him back. He stood still and watched her coming nearer. Suddenly, quite a few steps away from him, she too stopped. And they just looked at each other without saying a word.

His first thought was: "This girl is not Leni; not the Leni with the shining face and the golden braids. This is a factory worker, pale and tired, dressed like all of them—nothing but a tired girl." Then her very wretchedness touched his heart. And as she blushed, he felt as if he were only now finding out why he loved her. But he instantly mistrusted his feeling. He was not to be fooled so easily. Why didn't she come nearer and throw her arms around him? What was holding her back?

Leni saw his disappointment, followed by the fleeting expression of warmth, then his face growing cold and suspicious. There he stood: slender, tall, strong, looking at her appraisingly, hungrily and mistrustfully. During the last two hours, while waiting for him to come, she had hoped against hope for a miracle—that he would have some word for her which would take the fear of him away from her. But he did not say it.

It was the old actress, Leni's neighbor at the plant, who broke the spell that held them both. She was coming from the cement trough with some wet laundry in her hands, and stopped half-way between them. She looked at him and said: "So you are Hans." And after a moment, in which her

eyes narrowed, she stepped nearer to him and said seriously: "Just be nice to her, just be considerate." He did not like her.

The actress looked at Leni, then again at Hans, and back to Leni. And she said to her: "Well, why don't you embrace him?" and walked away without once turning her head.

Leni did not embrace him.

He stepped up to her and wanted to kiss her, but only said: "You have grown up, Leni."

"Yes," she answered, embarrassed. "Let's go to the canteen."

She led him to a building that was somewhat larger than the others. She still has the golden braids, he thought; she just wears them differently. The golden braids she still had.

The canteen was a large room with long rows of rough tables and benches—an empty, chilly, desolate place. "Can't we go somewhere else?" he asked.

She turned around quickly and looked at him fearfully, for only a moment; then there was an expression of resolution and even challenge in her eyes.

"We could go to one of the rooms of the day shift workers," she said.

They left the larger building and went two barracks farther, into a small room furnished with three field beds and a washstand. Three suitcases stood in military fashion at the bed-ends. There were no chairs. They sat down opposite each other on the beds. He noticed that she wore silk stockings. They excited him. But they also made him jealous.

"Where did you get those stockings?" he asked.

"You gave them to me," she answered, a little astonished.

He remembered now that he had sent her two pairs of silk stockings from Paris in the first year of the war. She must have saved them, unless she was lying.

He looked up from her legs. She was not the sweet little girl any more. But his hands, which had done so much mur-



derous work, as if weary of it, felt the desire to be tender—to caress and to play. He moved forward, and the touch of their knees went through and through him. She drew back, frightened again.

It only provoked him the more. Quickly he shifted close to her, put an arm around her shoulder, and stroked her hair. She closed her eyes and blushed, and clenched her hands against his chest. It gave him a sense of his strength; he enjoyed every moment of it, and slowly pressed nearer.

It seemed to him that she was giving in almost too quickly. But the next moment she pushed him back with unexpected hostility.

“No, Hans!” she burst out, getting up and moving wearily to the other bed.

She must have lost ten pounds, he thought, and wondered what made her still attractive to him. His eyes wandered slowly over her body, undressing her. Again they came to rest on her legs.

“Why did you put on these stockings?” he asked.

A sad smile appeared in her face. “Because I had saved them so long for you.”

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. He had never liked to talk much. To take orders and give orders, that was his style. And once more he was convinced that he had to impose his will on her, for that would stop her from being hysterical. He straightened up and said in a brisk, military tone: “Is there nobody else?” The thought of a rival whose neck he could break made him feel better.

“There is nobody else,” Leni answered, looking him straight in the face.

“If you are lying, I shall find out.”

“It’s the truth.” She still looked directly at him, not wavered a bit. And oddly enough he believed her.

“Then what’s the matter with you?” he asked impatiently and threateningly. “Karl and Bertha glance at each other

when I mention your name, and they want to know whether I am still in love with you. Mother gets flustered and secretive when I ask her about you. If there is nobody else, what is it?"

"They could not have told you," Leni answered. "It would have been against the rules. But I shall tell you."

"What's against the rules? What rules? What are you talking about?"

She stepped to the door and looked outside to see whether someone were listening. Closing the door quietly, she faced him squarely and said, her voice trembling ever so little: "It's this way, Hans. Once I believed in you, every word you said. When you called someone your enemy, he was my enemy too. When you said something had to be, I also said it had to be. But it is not like that any more."

She fell silent as he started to laugh—a burst of metallic laughter. "So that's it!" he cried. "You have joined the enemy! How frightening!" And he laughed again, but broke off when he saw the change in her face. She had become white as chalk and stared at him with unbelieving eyes, and then she said softly, but with a tone of decisiveness that went through and through him: "You can actually laugh! But every word you said brought only blood and misery on innocent people. That I know now. Not you, but your father, was right. But we never listened to him."

He felt suddenly cheap, and that only made him angry.

"Now I'll tell you something," he said, getting up. "I have dreamt of you day and night. For two years I have been looking forward to being with you. I am not sure, now, why. I have taken great risks to get this furlough—to be near you again I did more than you can ever think of. And I'm not going to have this furlough spoiled by your silly notions. I don't want to know them or anything about them. Think what you want, I don't care. But you shall love me!"

He stepped near to her. Now he grasped her by the shoul-

ders and pressed her close. "You must love me!" he insisted. "You must!" And he kissed her and loosened her braids and tore open her blouse and shirt.

"No, Hans, no! Not this way. No——" She fought him off, but he would not take no for an answer. This was what he had come for and he was going to have it.

"You are mine!" he shouted, grasping her once more and dragging her toward the bed. Yet he stopped when he felt all resistance melting in her. Cold and limp she hung in his arms, her lips moving silently as if in a prayer.

He let her slip onto the bed. Except for the speechless moving of her lips he would have thought she had fainted. Her eyes were closed. He could see the heartbeat in the artery at her throat.

He sat down beside her. Is this what I came back for? he thought. ("Be considerate," he remembered the old woman saying.) And yet there was something else involved. It was on Leni's face now, but he had seen it on every face since his return, and even in the empty streets—a quietness, a blankness. What was it?

He noticed how suddenly her restless lips ceased moving. The next moment she sat up and buttoned her blouse, and as she looked at him, calmly now, neither angrily nor reproachfully, he felt guilty, a feeling that he liked least of all.

He got up from the bed and stepped to the window. The road between the barracks, and even the square and the washing trough, were deserted. It had begun to rain. As he watched the first drops trickle down the window panes, the voice in him, the voice that made him ruthless even to himself, spoke rapidly: "Nobody wants you. Nobody likes you. Your father hates you. Your sister despises you. Only your mother . . . but she doesn't really know. And even this little bit of a thing wants to have nothing to do with you. You have to force them to like you. Either you conquer and rule or they will cast you out. . . ."

As he turned, Leni quickly hid her left hand, which she

had been holding close to her eyes. He was startled and his suspicions were aroused once more. He went to her, and forced the hand from behind her back, in order to peer at it. He did not see the faint scars on the back of the thumb, which she had been looking at; he saw only the callouses.

He let her hand drop. The next moment he felt her arms around him, and in tears she broke out: "I have waited for you too, day and night, many years. I often dreamt of lying in your arms. I still love you—that I cannot help. But not this way, not merely this. . . . I wouldn't be really yours and I could not make you happy. Only because I love you have I told you the truth."

No reaction appeared in him.

"Aren't you listening, Hans?"

He stared into space, motionless.

She stepped quietly away from him, toward the door. "I am very tired; I cannot stand on my feet any longer. You can now go and hand me over to your friends. Or you can think a bit of what it all means, and come back to me. I'll be waiting for you always. Now I must get some sleep."

As she passed the window on the outside she saw him sitting on the bed, both hands pressed to his head as if something were wrong with him . . . as he had done on that distant unforgotten night in the quarry.

# III

THE district command of the SS was quartered in a former convent, located on the bank of the Elbe not far from the barracks, a huge place enclosed by high walls. In spite of the occasional clatter of a machine gun or the roar of a starting automobile, its traditional atmosphere of silence and seclusion seemed still to prevail.

Captain Meissner, the district commander, was standing in the bay window of the large room which once had been the office of the Mother Superior. Through a pair of binoculars he observed a gang of civilians digging an opening in the ground of the nunnery's former flower garden. He turned only half-way when his adjutant entered, a slender lieutenant with a face as thin as a knife.

"There is a sergeant at the gate who wants to see you, sir," the lieutenant reported, standing at attention. "He refuses to give his name; says he is a personal friend who wants to surprise you."

Meissner looked through the binoculars again, focusing them on a tall soldier who was talking to the guards at the main entrance. He did not recognize him, nor did the man seem at all familiar. However, Meissner said presently: "Have his gun taken away and bring him up here."

The adjutant left, and Meissner sat down at his desk. He opened the top drawer at his right and released the safety catch on the pistol. Then, without closing the drawer he leaned back. An old friend? Who could it be? Was there still one of the old gang left . . . one of those blackmailers who knew his past?

The thought irritated him. Not because he was afraid of the disclosure that he had once served a prison term as a

card-sharp. No, his superiors knew all that. But he hated to be patted on the shoulder by people who considered themselves his intimates because the philistines had put him behind bars with them. As if doing the same thing made two people the same! He had thought them all dead, those witnesses of his submerged past. And here was still another one. An old friend to surprise him! It was nauseating.

Meissner lighted a cigarette and stepped in front of the huge mirror which he had ordered installed between the windows as soon as he had driven the nuns—those “black bugs”—out of the place. He liked to look at himself. All nerves he was, and muscle. The hard, closely shaven face, the bald, sharply edged head, always reminded him of Roman sculptures. But he preferred to think of his head as an essential part of a complicated machine. The deep, skull-like hollows under his cheekbones helped to create the abstract, inhuman impression he made on everyone. It was one of his rare pleasures to know that people felt themselves go cold when they saw him. That was as it should be—that his very appearance should confront them with his utter contempt for their existence. He made them realize their nothingness. Looking at them with his needle-sharp, pale eyes he was able to blast their illusions. How they squirmed! All they wanted was to vegetate—to enjoy life, as they called it when they lived aimlessly, like animals. Well, he never had lived that way. There was something bigger than living. Something beyond existence. That was what he was after. . . .

Meissner went behind his desk when he heard steps approaching in the corridor. To surprise him! What a silly notion. Whoever this so-called friend was, he would quickly give up the idea of finding an old buddy in a powerful position with whom he could be chummy and from whom he could extort favors.

The lieutenant entered with Hans. Both stopped inside the door, standing at attention. Meissner was facing them, yet it seemed as if he were not looking at them. And it

took quite a while before he said: "You may go, Lieutenant."

But he did not say "At ease" when the lieutenant had left the room, nor did he come forward from his desk to shake hands as Hans had expected him to do. Meissner just stared as if he were seeing a ghost. Hans thought that he had grown a lot older. If he had not known him so well he would have been frightened by the way he stared at him.

The bell in the tower rang twelve times, and only after the sound of the last stroke had faded away did Meissner speak. "Hans, you have come back," he said. "I thought you dead for a long time. But you are alive. And you have become a man."

He said it very clearly, pronouncing every word with precision, and Hans heard him distinctly, yet he had the feeling that he did not understand what Meissner meant, and that the man was insane.

"I am on furlough," he answered, still standing at attention.

"Sit down," Meissner said. He seated himself behind his desk, closing the top drawer in which the pistol lay in readiness, then opening it again.

"The last time I saw you was at the Party Day in Nuremberg, in 1936," Meissner recollected.

"Yes." Hans wanted to add, "Those were great days," but he held the remark back in order not to imply that he thought the present less wonderful. He could not be too careful.

The telephone rang; Meissner answered, giving orders sharply, exactly. He never spoke a word too much, and he always, as long as Hans had known him, gave orders. All at once he no longer seemed insane.

Putting the receiver down Meissner fixed his pale eyes sharply on the visitor. "Remember the night when that crook was visiting me?" he asked, smiling suddenly.

Hans knew instantly what was on Meissner's mind. He

saw the garret in Leipzig where they had lived together and where once an old fellow-jailbird of Meissner's had come to blackmail him. The scene was clear in Hans's memory—of his throwing the fellow down the stairs, and of Meissner airily quoting one of his poems. But he had also not forgotten Meissner's hatred of people who knew his origins. He was on his guard. Looking puzzled for a moment, he answered casually: "Oh, that louse! I would throw him down the stairs again with pleasure."

Meissner smiled again, partly closing the top drawer. The next moment his face was as dead as a mask, and his eyes grew very narrow. Leaning forward he said: "I wrote poems on paper then; now I write them in deeds."

Hans again thought him mad, but he merely remarked: "It was a great time!" If Meissner still took him for the idiot he had been at seventeen, hungry for ideals, listening with reverence to his poems, cleaning his shoes, that was all to the good. Yet he meant what he said. Ah, to believe that way again!

"Yes, it was, in a way," Meissner agreed, then after a pause, went on: "But there is no real greatness without responsibility. It's too easy to be in opposition. And who were our adversaries? The fat bourgeoisie! The dull union officials who busied themselves bargaining for little profits, making small steps forward and backward on the path of mediocrity, trying to catch life with little nets and hooks, and to strangle it with their petty doctrines. It was easy, too easy, to beat them with our dreams and ideas."

Meissner's eloquence again captivated Hans; his words reawakened in him a host of memories. "They were wonderful days; to dream and to conquer," he said reminiscently. "Remember the time we traveled from place to place?"

Meissner laughed, a short, sharp bark. "The voice of the people!" he exclaimed contemptuously. It was his expression for a propaganda trick they had often used during the



fight for power in Germany: Hans would rise up at a meeting, pose as a Communist, and make a wild, radical speech to provide Meissner with the opportunity to reply with sensible, moderate arguments, and to point out that the party alone could protect the decent citizens from the desperate mood of the mob. They had always had great success with these tactics.

"And how is it at the front?" Meissner asked with an abruptness that took Hans unawares.

"Terrible," he answered. "The Russians know what they are doing. They are strong. They have American arms. They are driving us back."

He realized too late that he had fallen into a trap. Meissner's eyes were almost closed now, but Hans could feel the needle-sharpness of his glance.

"You got the Iron Cross first class. For what?" Meissner asked.

Hans answered in the words of his citation: "For holding a forward position with hand grenades for three days . . . for crawling up to a tank and destroying it single-handed . . . for resolutely clearing a bridge blocked with fleeing civilians. . . ." And while he repeated these words a cold shiver ran down his spine as on that glorious morning when he had been decorated in front of the regiment. Except that now he was not elated—rather, afraid. He felt as if Meissner were looking through and through him.

"Fine!" said Meissner. "But now you have had enough of it. You think we will lose the war, and that it makes no sense to fight on. . . ."

"No! I didn't say that. I only meant that the fight is a stiff one. And, of course, I am glad that I have got a furlough." That was the truth, and it sounded truthful to Hans himself and made him feel better.

Meissner slowly opened his eyes. "Sure," he said. "From what section of the front do you come?"

Hans had himself under control again. "That I am not

permitted to tell," he answered. "We have strict orders——"

"You can tell me," Meissner interrupted.

"Sorry, orders are orders," Hans answered briskly, relieved to have found a way out of the trap. Meissner was clever, but he too was not born yesterday.

"Correct!" Meissner answered, smiling again. It was easy to see that Hans had outgrown his romanticism, but he still had no brains. Otherwise he would be more than a sergeant. What a good-looking youth he had been! Now even that was gone. Meissner closed the top drawer with a bang. Then, looking at his wrist-watch, he said matter-of-factly: "I suppose you came to ask some favor; everybody does."

"That's right," Hans answered without hesitation. "I would have come to see you anyway, but I also want something. My girl is working on the night shift in the ammunition factory at the arena. That makes her no good for me. Is it possible for her to get a few days off?"

"How long is your furlough?"

"Two weeks."

Meissner pushed one of the little white buttons on his desk, and the lieutenant came in.

"The sergeant will give you the name of a girl working at the ammunition plant. She gets two weeks off." And looking at Hans he continued: "Have your fun with her. Babies are as important as guns."

As Meissner rose Hans jumped to attention.

"I thank you obediently, sir," he said.

After Hans and the lieutenant had left, Meissner again looked at his wrist-watch, following the jerky movements of its hands with growing suspense. Then he took the binoculars from the desk and stepped to the window to watch the execution of the civilians who had been digging their common grave in the former flower garden of the nunnery. At twelve-thirty sharp the clatter of a machine gun made the window panes sing.

Meissner liked the glassy, high-pitched whine, and he

liked to see people die. The quick change from life to death, brought about by his word, always fascinated him. How precise was the poetry of real death! No one had ever captured in words this sudden, indisputable finality. . . . Now truly he wrote poems in deeds.

The machine-gun crew had packed up and was hurrying to the mess hall when the telephone rang. Meissner turned, lifted the receiver, listened, and straightened up. Berlin was calling—headquarters of the SS.

Hans was on his way back from the convent to the city. The guards had snapped to attention when he left. The lieutenant had treated him more like one of superior than of lower rank. By telephone he had transmitted to the plant the order for Leni's vacation. He had even added that Leni be informed at the barracks that she need not report for work that evening. And when Hans had asked the lieutenant for the nearest eating place he had sent an orderly with him to the mess hall. There Hans had eaten better than in years. The SS took care of itself.

To be a friend of Meissner's seemed to mean a great deal. Hans could not help smiling. If they only knew how he got his furlough. The lieutenant would have carried out an order for his execution with the same metallic coldness and efficiency that he did everything else.

With this thought Hans's enjoyment of his success vanished. Sweat broke out all over him with the realization of what would have happened if Meissner had asked him for his furlough paper. He must get rid of it. He could say he had lost it, and ask for a marching order to get back to the front. Nobody who wanted to go to the front was suspect. Yes, he had to get rid of that damned paper.

Hans turned his mind to Leni. He was about to decide how best to deal with her when on the road behind him the roar of a high-powered motor came rapidly nearer. He turned and saw an army car bearing the SS flag shooting over

the ridge, and just had time to leap aside. The car raced past him, but the next moment its brakes began to shriek and it came to an abrupt stop about a hundred feet ahead. Again he felt the sweat break out all over him.

The lieutenant came out of the car and waved to him. Hans hesitated for an instant, his heart pounding, then ran up to the car. Meissner sat at the wheel, and snapped: "Get in. I'll take you on a little trip." He snapped the words, but there was no threat in his tone. Hans took his place in the car, the lieutenant sitting beside Meissner in front, and they raced on.

"We'll be back in the morning," Meissner continued. "Your girl can wait till then. Better for both of you if she gets some rest before you get hold of her."

Hans agreed, but at the same time he did not relish the idea of again postponing his being together with Leni. And what right did Meissner have to grab him that way and interfere with his plans? He was on furlough after two years at the Russian front. This argument shot through Hans's mind, but he kept it to himself. Instead he merely said: "I was on my way to get my uniform pressed somewhere."

"No, I need you just as you are," Meissner answered, and then explained: "I have to make a speech at a party meeting in Berlin tonight to a bunch of waverers. You will help me, as in old times. I will tell you later what to say." And after a short pause, glancing sharply at Hans, he added: "It will do you a lot of good too."

While Hans wondered what Meissner meant, he answered as if very happy about the prospect: "It will be like old times." Fine, if Meissner still considered him a tool.

The car raced northward on the empty highway. Once they passed marching troops; Hans judged them with the experienced eyes of many campaigns.

"What do you think of them?" Meissner asked.

"Bad material, too old."

"Good enough for what they are needed for," Meissner

answered without explaining what he meant. But he looked worried.

Later on they drove beside an endless column of young, strong recruits singing in the rain. The sight of them raised Hans's spirits, especially since the lieutenant, on Meissner's orders, had handed him a brandy bottle and he had taken a deep sip. Meissner did not drink—he never had—but his face cleared up and he even joined briefly in the singing of the soldiers.

Unexpectedly the car left the highway and turned into a country road. After a few minutes' drive, one of those country seats came into sight, a castle-like building on a hill, such as Hans had come to know from his youthful wanderings through Germany, but only from the outside of the surrounding walls and fences. The car came to a stop at the foot of a broad stairway leading up to an impressive entrance framed by overhanging, deep-green ivy. Huge, deeply curtained windows were blinded with rain.

"Get the countess!" Meissner said to the lieutenant. "And if she makes any excuses——" There was no need for him to finish the threatening sentence. The heavy oak door of the house was opened by an old manservant in livery, and a young girl came out, followed by a maid in black dress and white apron, carrying a suitcase and an umbrella.

It was odd, the way the girl came down the stairs. She would hesitate and seem to hold herself back, then take two steps at once as if pulled down toward the car. For an imperceptible moment she stood still, only to move on again with resolution. The maid behind her also alternately hesitated and rushed forward in parallel, almost identical movements, as if connected with her mistress by some invisible mechanism.

Hans thought he had taken too deep a sip from the brandy bottle, but the whole thing was real. Meissner left the car and slowly kissed the girl on the wrist, between the glove and the sleeve of her brand-new raincoat. But she

did not even look at him. The lieutenant held the door open for her, and she stepped into the car and sat down in his place.

"Beate, this is an old friend of mine; his name is Hans," Meissner said by way of introduction. "And this, Hans, is my dearest friend, Countess Beate von Schillings."

Hans straightened up and saluted. The countess nodded without looking at him. He felt somewhat embarrassed, but he did not think he was being snubbed. The countess was the most beautiful, the most delicate creature he had ever seen.

The lieutenant closed the car door, relieved the maid of the suitcase, which had a seven-pointed crown stamped on the leather, and took his place in the rear beside Hans. As soon as Meissner was behind the wheel he stepped on the gas, and a moment later the car raced back to the highway.

The fragrance of a strange, bitter perfume began to fill the car. It was a very faint scent, but penetrating and exciting. At first Hans did not even dare to look at the countess. Then slowly he moved his eyes in her direction.

He saw only her profile—the high brow, the chiseled nose, the curve of her lips, a childlike, obstinate chin, and the line of her long neck disappearing into the collar of the coat. The mouth did not quite fit into the innocence of the face; the lips seemed to know too much. Her skin was pale; transparent, like the petals of white roses. There was no rouge on her cheeks but the lips were painted in a sharp, hard, unnatural red. Her hair, which she tied in a knot at the neck, and her eyes had the warm brown color of a deer. Like a deer, too, she had come down the stairs.

Frightened and curious, Hans thought. Then he became aware that Meissner was watching him in the mirror, and quickly looked away.

Not a word was spoken; staring straight ahead at the road, the countess did not once look at Meissner. If there was any expression on her face at all, or in the manner in which

she held her head, high, chin thrown forward, it was an expression of arrogance—of incredible arrogance and nobility at the same time. And she was only a child, not more than seventeen, Hans guessed.

Meissner suddenly laughed. It was a short, shrill bark that sounded as if an idea that pleased him had just occurred to him. And he stepped still harder on the gas and the car shot with still madder speed through the dreary, rainy landscape.

The lieutenant beside Hans sat straight and expressionless in his seat, his right hand always on the holster of his pistol. . . .

They arrived in Berlin in the late afternoon. Meissner drove up to the entrance of the huge hotel near the Potsdamer Platz, which was reserved for SS men on business in the capital. A suite was waiting for him and the countess, who had not spoken a word or changed her attitude in any way during the drive. Hans and the lieutenant received a room across the hall from Meissner's suite.

To his welcome surprise Hans found a bathroom connected with this room, and soon he was sitting in the tub enjoying himself in the warm water. There was even a piece of soap. It made him think of the evening before when he had found his mother in that cold, dirty apartment. The SS certainly lived differently. But perhaps it had to be like that. There was not enough of everything for everybody. . . .

During the drive to the meeting Meissner gave Hans his instructions. "You will speak after me," he said. "I will introduce you as what you are: the typical front fighter. Tell them in your own words what beasts the Russians are—cruel, dirty, subhuman. Tell them that the army can hold them back only if the home front stands to the last woman and child behind it. Can you do that? Simply, convincingly, straight from your heart?"

"I think so," Hans answered with deliberate slowness. "It happens to be my conviction."

"So much the better. Try to cut out all clichés. Don't try to touch their hearts. Make them fear and give them hope—you will see how I do it."

And as an afterthought, Meissner added before stopping the car: "And make it short."

The meeting took place in one of the solemn lecture amphitheatres of the Technological Institute. An audience of mature men in party uniform, sprinkled with a few civil servants in black suits and high collars, filled the benches to the highest tier. There were no flags, no fanfare, no drums, as was the custom at meetings for a casual audience. The lights were on full. An elderly, scholarly man wiped the board behind the speaker's platform clear of its mathematical formulas till it was shining black.

The entire place bristled with SS guards whose silent precise movements seemed even more than ordinarily ominous in the scientific atmosphere of the Institute. Every new arrival sensed the nervous tension in the air, like undischarged electricity in the skies before a storm. Nobody seemed to know who was to address the meeting or what its purpose was. The suspense was heightened by the fact that obviously only higher functionaries of the party had been invited.

The meeting was opened with a short speech by the supreme SS leader. He was not present in person, but spoke by telephone over the loudspeaker system. He asked to be excused because of high business of state and regretted that he was unable to deliver the address he had intended. Then he named the speaker who was to talk in his place and concluded: "Captain Meissner has broken all records in the drive for total mobilization. There is not a woman, or child, or old man in his district, whether healthy or sick, who is living for anything but the war. I am sure you will listen



to him with great interest and—" there was a pause "—to your own profit. *Heil Hitler!*"

While the audience rose from their seats and shouted, "*Heil Hitler!*" Meissner left the front row, where he had been seated up to this moment between the lieutenant and Hans, and stepped up to the speaker's platform. The auditorium became dead quiet again. He felt hostility toward him, suddenly and silently in the air. And he enjoyed it.

There were many in the audience of higher rank than he, but none of greater power. They were all only party members, while he belonged to the SS. The SS leader's last words had given them the reason for the meeting: the SS was to tell them what they were required to think from now on and to repeat a hundred times at a hundred meetings in their party districts. And they felt that they had been ordered to listen to this arrogant SS man because they were not fully trusted. It was not a pleasant feeling.

Meissner faced the audience motionlessly. There they sat, the handymen and barkers of the party. When they had joined the movement they had had no other ambition than to secure their personal fortunes and grab a part of the spoils. Now they were beginning to find out that they had made a pact with the devil and that there was no way of escape. Slowly Meissner looked over the mountain of faces confronting him. And they all became one face: a greedy, cowardly, lazy face; a hypocritical, ugly face—the face of the human race which he despised.

"Many of us," he finally began, "are thinking in their hearts that we will lose this war, as the Imperial Reich lost the last one." He lashed the sentence accusingly into the audience, and paused. And as he expected, a muffled murmur of protest ran through the rows, insincere protests camouflaged by expressions of astonishment. But under his cold stare the audience quickly became quiet again, and he continued: "I have been ordered to speak here today to destroy the defeatist notions which many in our midst are

harboring. You are responsible leaders. I can speak frankly. And I intend to do so."

Hans began to enjoy Meissner's performance. He knew all his tricks as a speaker. And he, too, detested the audience. He had seen at one glance what all these people were—vulgar profiteers. Now that the party and the war had stopped being merely a lucrative business they wavered and were frightened. But Meissner would tell them! And he himself would tell them too; and not only because he had orders to do so, but on his own.

Meissner began by drawing up a balance sheet between the contending powers. For more than an hour he spoke of the weaknesses of the Third Reich and the growing strength of the United Nations. He made not the slightest attempt to retouch the depressing picture. From the growing lack of vital materials in consequence of the blockade, he went on to the shortage of man power, to the signs of exhaustion that could be seen everywhere while the enemy, especially America, was only beginning to fight in earnest. Wherever he turned the attention of his listeners he made them perceive the seemingly unavoidable defeat of the Third Reich.

Hans wondered whether Meissner himself believed what he was saying, and to what extent. He guessed that it was all some kind of trick of the SS and that Meissner surely had a trump card up his sleeve. For a while Hans took special delight in watching a fat fellow a few seats away who had been quite jolly before the meeting began. Now he was wiping the sweat from his forehead and changing color every few minutes, his moon-face growing red or pale, like a signal lamp switched on and off. And his heavy breathing reminded Hans of the asthmatic little locomotive of the field railway at the front. But by and by even he himself could not resist the cold logic of Meissner, and he forgot the audience and the speaker's tricks and sat spellbound like all the rest.

The leader of the SS had said that Meissner would tell

them how the Third Reich was going to win the war, yet Meissner had all but proved that Germany had already lost it. And now he dwelt on what defeat would mean, on the terrible fate that was in store for Germany, and particularly for everyone who had ever worn a brown shirt. "Not one of us will survive," he said coldly. And everyone in the audience knew that he spoke the truth, because every one of them knew what they had done to others.

But suddenly Meissner changed his tune. Stepping forward from the speaker's desk to the edge of the platform he said: "But we *shall* win the war!" And these few words electrified the audience. A forward movement ran through the rows. The fat man near Hans almost fell from his seat as he bent closer to catch every word that Meissner was going to say now—those longed-for words, which he was willing to believe if for no other reason than that they must contain his only hope.

Meissner let them gasp in suspense for a while longer. He gave a detailed appraisal of the successes of the German U-boats, made some vague but optimistic remarks about new secret weapons, military and political, and explained that German air power was wisely being held back and built up to meet the final attack of the enemy. Now he came to his main point:

"The enemy will be unable to bring his superiority in man power and material into play," he said, raising his voice. "The strategic advantage, the advantage of the inner line and of experience, are on our side. The entire problem of victory in this war has resolved itself to one single question: whether we will be able to beat back the decisive attack on our fortress. If we succeed in that, in that one battle, the war is won for us."

He paused. Half of the audience applauded, intoxicated by the vision of victory, the other half remained silent. Meissner knew their thoughts.

"You may ask: Will the enemy not repeat his attack if his first attempt is beaten back? But this question only seems realistic; it is not so in fact. Whoever thinks in this way is ignoring the psychological and political factors. If we repulse the attack, the enemy would not be able to repeat it quickly. A lull would follow, a creative pause for us. Exhausted, and disillusioned by their so-called Allies, the Russians could not and would not go on with the war. The Chinese would be in a similar position. The British Empire would begin to crumble under the impact of defeat. But most important, the United States, our strongest enemy, will at that time be split by the agitation of the presidential election. The isolationists will be able to lift their heads again; the pacifists will demand an end to the war. And we shall fan their desire for peace with a peace offer so modest that it will startle the world."

He paused again, and Hans, who knew him better than all the others, saw how much Meissner enjoyed the surprise and uncertainty he had provoked with this announcement. He almost smiled as he continued:

"We should offer a peace that would seem to be a victory for our enemies because they do not yet know that during these long years of war, hidden by the tumult, our ideas have been on the march in the whole world. The pre-war world will never return, regardless of who wins the armed conflict. We have already won the war of ideas. The fundamental question in this sense is not who will win the war, but who will really profit by the great revolution of which this war is only a part. The question is whether the German nation will merely have sacrificed itself to bring about the new world—whether the other nations will reap the fruits of our sacrifices—or whether we will reap the fruit. I say that we shall be the reapers!"

Applause interrupted the speaker. But Meissner went on: "Today we stand on the brink of disaster, but at the same

time the morning of complete victory is dawning. It is our greatest moment in history. We shall be worthy of it or perish. We still have the choice."

An outburst of tremendous applause and shouts of "*Heil Hitler*" interrupted Meissner. After their fright at the nightmare of certain defeat, the audience exploded in sudden relief.

Hans had also been taken in by the argument; now under the pressure of the general enthusiasm around him, the doubts that had beset him dispersed. He joined earnestly in acclaiming the speaker.

Meissner, after waiting a few moments, cut the excitement short with a precise movement of his right hand. They obeyed him now like marionettes. And he continued: "We shall win. And the SS can assure you that whoever thinks differently will be dealt with as a traitor, however high his place."

In the dead silence which followed these words, before the defeatists in the audience had the presence of mind to applaud, one of the doors opened and an officer of the SS entered, rushed up to Meissner, and handed him a slip of paper.

He stopped and read the note while the audience held its breath. Then he glanced at his wrist-watch and said: "Enemy planes in force are on their way in the direction of this city. They will be over us in about twenty minutes. Those of you who can reach your quarters in that time will leave. The others will assemble in the air-raid shelter below the Institutel"

The audience obviously wanted to rise in haste, but again he held them back with the short imperative movement of his right hand. And then he said with tormenting deliberateness:

"Great times are ahead of us. We have the means to achieve victory. To repulse the invasion is our greatest and

last chance. It will be a fight in our favor to begin with, and we shall win because we have the spiritual power not to shrink from the harshest measures needed to make the German people see the necessities of the historic hour. *Heil Hitler!*"

The meeting had come to an end. The fat man rushed up to Meissner to congratulate him. To the accompaniment of shouts of "*Heil Hitler,*" the lecture hall emptied quickly. Hans observed that most of them would have liked to run, but restrained themselves. Meissner remained standing on the platform, watching them.

The countess sat in the darkened hotel room, dressed in the Lucien Lelong evening gown that Meissner had bought for her in Paris. It was of green wool, tight-fitting, with deep décolletage, and gave her a sensuous, serpentine appearance. With it went a long, black evening coat cut with the severity of a nun's cloak.

Beate had been awakened by the air-raid alarm. The captain had told her he would be back at ten for supper, and he always arrived on the dot. She had dressed, reclined on the chaise longue to rest, and had fallen asleep. It was the first air-raid alarm she had ever experienced. The sirens seemed frightening, but she was not afraid. She simply sat up and waited. The thought of going to the hotel shelter occurred to her, but she dismissed it instantly. That sort of thing was for other people. Nothing would happen to her.

When the first detonation of the flak firing at the approaching planes made the window panes and the chandelier tremble, she got up, opened the curtains of the window looking out on the wide circle of the square, and watched the long fingers of the searchlights stab into the blue-black sky. It was beautiful.

She did not know what hour it was and wondered whether

the captain would be back on the minute, as always. His punctuality was one of the things about him that puzzled her. She herself had no sense of time, and she was rather inclined to think that time and efficiency were plebeian notions. Perhaps the captain would not be punctual this time?

As Beate put the question to herself she was quite aware of the fact that what she was really asking herself was whether he would be killed by a bomb, and what that would mean to her. She imagined him driving through a street like mad, trying to be on time, a building crashing down and burying him. But that was only the reflection of a newsreel she had seen recently. The illusion was not convincing, with the captain as a victim. He would die quite differently. He was no ordinary person—so much she could say for him. He had a destiny.

The fires that had started somewhere in the wilderness of ugly houses that Berlin always had been for Beate, began to brighten the sky. The first explosions of bombs in the factory districts on the outskirts rocked the city. A burning plane shot across the sky. It had a tail of flames like the meteor in the old book in her father's library. Beautiful!

Her father hated Meissner and wanted to kill him, but restrained himself because of the protection the estate received from the captain by reason of her friendship with him. Yet had there been nothing else, the captain would have been dead from the time her father first suspected him of "humiliating her"—as the old man expressed it in his old-fashioned way. Perhaps the real reason was that the captain was the stronger of the two and simply would not allow an aristocrat to shoot him after accepting favors from him. Father had refused at first to invite the captain to dinner, and to place his young daughter next to him at the table, but the captain had compelled him to do so. There was nothing for nothing on this earth.

On his part the captain was mistaken if he thought of her

merely as a noble Fräulein with whom he could toy in order to compensate for his inferiority complexes. It was not yet decided who was playing with whom.

Beate heard the door open behind her, and the captain stop at the threshold. She knew that her figure must be outlined against the flares from incendiary bombs exploding outside, and she did not move.

She heard him closing the door and stepping near to her. Then she felt the beat of his breath on her bare shoulders. The thought that he might have hurried in fear for her crossed her mind as she felt him clamping both his hands around her upper arms, pressing them with force. And then she thought that the marks would be covered by her long gloves, and that he had no other way of expressing himself than by inflicting pain. But she did not really feel it as pain. . . .

When he wanted to draw close, she quickly switched around and confronted him, asking, "What time is it?" He looked at his watch automatically—the fool! she thought—and turning his wrist to the reflection from outside, he answered: "Ten o'clock."

She laughed and said, "You *are* a plebeian," and turned away from him, saying over her shoulder: "I'm hungry, if you don't mind." And she put on her nun's cloak.

The dinner that Meissner had carefully ordered before leaving for the meeting was served in makeshift fashion in the relatively luxurious shelter of the SS hotel. One reached the long, narrow room by way of a passage through the wine cellar and a very steep staircase leading down still deeper. The lieutenant and Hans were waiting, reserving one of the small tables that stood along the walls in front of the benches upholstered with red material.

The room was filled with people, mainly SS officers and their women companions. Many of them had been at theaters or concerts when the alarm was sounded. They had rushed to the hotel and into the safety of this shelter, which



was considered among the strongest and most comfortable in the capital. In a few minutes the atmosphere of the place had become one of forced courage and gaiety. To ignore the growing fury of the British bomber attack, or at least to pretend that one was ignoring it, seemed the thing to do. Near a little bar a gramophone was playing dance music. Champagne bottles were being opened everywhere. Women's laughter cascaded over the somber humming of a ventilator in a far-off corner.

Hans sat bewildered on the right side of the countess; Meissner sat at her left, beside him the lieutenant—serious, motionless, one hand on the holster of his pistol. He neither ate nor drank and was beginning to get on Hans's nerves. The champagne to which Hans had become unaccustomed since the campaign in France went to his head.

He had been furious when the alarm had robbed him of the opportunity of making his speech against the profiteers. He had been eager to tell them how a front-line soldier felt, or at least how he felt after Meissner's explanation that only one more effort was necessary to win the war. He had again known why he had been fighting for so many years; why he had murdered and slaughtered; and had at last understood why the sacrifices that were asked from everyone—from old and young—had to be made.

Now that the champagne had gone to his head, and these elegant people were laughing and drinking and dancing before his eyes, he was no longer quite sure. The remorse he had again felt for deserting the front ceased to prick him. The contradiction between the behavior of these people and the behavior Meissner was preaching to others was too obvious. But the thought of it appeared more and more vaguely in Hans's mind, befogged by the illusions of his growing drunkenness.

He began to enjoy the great change after the long period at the front; this was certainly better than a cellar in the ruins of a Russian factory. Why should he not have some

fun while the furlough lasted? He felt almost as if he belonged to the élite when some of the diners, after their surprise at seeing a simple sergeant in this environment, raised their glasses and drank to him, thinking that he must be an especially distinguished soldier. It made him laugh, but it also made him like these people. They had a right to behave as they did. Surely they would sacrifice themselves just as lightheartedly as they were acting now—not worrying for a moment about what was happening outside, or not showing it if they did. And as long as Meissner had nothing against it, why should he care? Since his lashing of the profiteers the captain was his hero again, as in old times.

Suddenly the shelter seemed to leap and the earth to roll away from underneath. The lights went out for a moment; then they came on. But in that moment it had become deathly quiet. Everybody sat or stood as if petrified, women with their wine glasses half raised and their eyes wide open with fear. The countess alone looked around arrogantly. The distant rumble of explosions could be heard to the accompaniment of the gramophone. A second later the danger seemed to have passed. The crowd became lively again; the women raised the glasses to their lips and went on as if nothing had happened; only they became somewhat gayer and laughed even more loudly as they embraced their men and danced on.

Hans noticed the two furrows that appeared between Meissner's eyes, a sign that he was angry. He observed the dancing couples and did not seem to like them. The countess watched Meissner, and a faint smile appeared on her face, like a queer light coming from the depths of her eyes. It gave her lovely features, which seemed much softer in the artificial light than in the daytime, a cruel expression. And Hans heard her say: "I like to dance too, Captain."

Meissner did not even give her an answer. He just sat there, his face hard and sober, staring at the crowd which was growing more and more tumultuous. But the countess

repeated, "I should like to dance with you," the cruel smile lighting her face.

After a pause Meissner looked at her as Hans had never seen him look at anybody—with so much hatred. But she went on smiling, arching her neck arrogantly and provokingly, not afraid at all. And she seemed even not to notice that the shelter shook again, though less violently than before, and that the laughter and chatter became subdued for a second time before it was resumed.

But she had noticed it. "Dancing under a volcano," she said, putting her delicate fingers on Meissner's hand and pressing her nails slowly into it. Meissner watched her, fascinated. Then something happened, unbelievable for Hans, yet he saw it with his own eyes: Meissner became pale and trembled. And he rose, taking the countess very courteously in his arms.

Hans could not take his eyes off them as they danced. Other dancers made room for them and looked at them as if they had never seen two people so much in love and so shamelessly. But when they returned to the table Meissner almost threw the countess onto the bench, laughing his short, shrill bark. The countess seemed to enjoy his fury. She looked at him triumphantly and said: "You dance well, Captain."

That was the last Hans saw of her that night. Suddenly the lights went out and did not come on again. A tremendous explosion shook the shelter like an earthquake. There was a moment of abrupt silence—only the gramophone continued playing—then women began to scream, tables were overthrown, glasses and plates crashed, bottles rolled on the floor. People tripped over the debris as they tried to reach the exit; others stepped on the bottles and fell. In no time the room was filled with cries and groans.

As an experienced front soldier who had been bombed a hundred times, Hans knew that the shelter had not really been hit. He listened to the tumult with satisfaction and ob-

served the scramble of the frightened crowd as someone snapped on a flashlight. In his drunkenness he enjoyed the senseless confusion.

The gramophone went on playing. The voice of Meissner cut through the noise, sharply and distinctly. He tried to stop the panic; he never lost his head. Then the table before Hans was shifted away from under his elbows and he fell forward in his stupor.

## I V

CAPTAIN MEISSNER and his party left Berlin for Dresden the next morning, while the whole city smelt of fire and the acrid fumes from explosions of the big bombs. Ambulances raced past. Rescue crews were on their way. These consisted mainly of Hitler Youth groups—boys and girls who marched in step, singing martial songs—followed by older, silent men in mufti. Columns of Russian and Polish war prisoners, with shovels and picks on their shoulders, were driven to the devastated parts of the city. Most of them looked down apathetically at the black asphalt, which they trod with tired feet bound in rags.

A drum was beating inside Hans's head. Behind his left ear the sharp wound, which was covered with a small adhesive bandage, burned like fire. The "home warriors" had behaved like lunatics when they thought the shelter had been hit. One of them had stepped on his head, and he had come to only when Meissner's searching flashlight stabbed into his eyes. An army doctor treated him in the hotel lobby. He had given him a powder that quickly relieved him of pain, and Hans had slept wonderfully, like a general, in the fine, soft bed—his first real bed in almost two years. If only he could have had another powder after getting up, he would have felt fine! But he had not succeeded in getting one. The old hotel porter looked at him sadly, as if surprised at his request, and shook his head.

The lieutenant beside Hans in the rear of the car sat up straight as always, his right hand on the holster of his pistol, his face thin and sharp as a knife. Meissner had his eyes on the road, on the lookout for ambulances and the many detour signs. The countess seemed to be freezing in the fresh morning air, though she had a red shawl wrapped around

her shoulders. She was half asleep, but from time to time she threw a glance at Meissner. Once or twice she moved her lips as if she wanted to speak to him, but never did.

The car passed through a back street near Tempelhof airfield, over rough cobblestones that increased the drumming in Hans's head. Suddenly Meissner stepped on the brakes and brought the car to a full stop, throwing them all forward. Simultaneously he snapped to the lieutenant: "Get that!" pointing at a sign planted on top of some smoldering ruins. Its inscription read: "For this we thank our Fuehrer." It was one of those Nazi posters which the party had stuck on every piece of construction ten years ago when the Fuehrer had been putting the unemployed back to work.

Meissner had turned pale. The countess, on the other hand, seemed amused, and when he saw her smile, he remarked in a tone full of hatred: "Who laughs last, laughs best."

During the next two hours of the drive no word was spoken. Half-way along the side road that led to the place where the countess lived Meissner slowed down. At a distant bend the tall figure of a man, carrying a rifle hunter's fashion but under the left arm, stopped abruptly at the sight of the car.

"You can ask Father now," the countess broke out suddenly from her stony silence, "and you will get the same answer: No!"

Meissner brought the car to a stop and looked at her. Then he said softly: "One more word, and——" He did not finish the sentence. The lieutenant straightened up still more—the first reaction that Hans had noticed in him. He must despise the girl, thought Hans.

"Not everything is for sale—or can be stolen," the countess went on, ignoring Meissner's threat. And the captain, instead of hitting her across the face as Hans expected him to do, had again momentarily the fascinated expression of the night before, when in the shelter the countess had

clawed his hand with her fingernails and made him dance with her against his will.

The two remained thus for a few moments, till Meissner barked his short laugh and said: "*Qui vivra, verra.*" He drove on toward the huge old man who stood waiting, with feet apart, in the middle of the road.

"Hallo, Herr Graf!" Meissner cried, leaving the car with the countess.

The count was an old man with a Hindenburg face that had lost its force. He had only one arm; the right arm was missing. The end of the useless, well-creased sleeve was stuck neatly into the pocket of his short coat, which resembled an officer's tunic. On the other sleeve the count wore a band with the insignia of the newly created *Landwacht*, an organization of country folk—squires and farmers alike—formed to protect their property against marauding foreign workers, escaped war prisoners, and the hordes of adolescent city youths who had been running wild lately since the closing of many schools for lack of teachers.

The count ignored Meissner. He looked only at his daughter, who in the brief interval between leaving the car and embracing her father had changed completely into a lovable, enthusiastic child. "We had a wonderful time, Father," she cried laughingly, "but I'm happy to be back with you."

"We could hear the explosions of bombs and the barking of the flak last night, and see the gleaming fires in the sky," the old man said. "I could not close an eye, worrying about you. I shall never let you go again, Beate."

"Nothing happened to us. Nothing will ever happen to me as long as I am with the captain, Father."

"I doubt that," was the dry answer. It was only now that the count seemed to notice Meissner, and he spoke to him in the tone of a superior officer. "Our stable was broken into last night; two of my best pigs are missing. If you cannot protect us from robbery, at least don't send your spies

snooping around to see whether we slaughtered the animals without permission."

"Your word as an officer is enough," Meissner answered. The count again looked at his daughter and at Meissner, as if not quite sure what to make of them. Then, without another word, he walked on, past the car and down the road, his face twisted in frustration. At least that was the impression it made on Hans, who thought that Meissner was lording it over the old man; and he laughed to himself about these proud nobles who had once thought they could use the Fuehrer and the party for their own ends and had then to learn who was the true master.

Meissner and the countess came back into the car without speaking. The silence between them seemed even deeper now, and colder. Meissner drove on to the broad landing of the wide stairway in front of the huge mansion that looked almost like a castle. As soon as the car had stopped, the door was opened by the same old manservant in livery, and the same maid in black dress and white apron came down the stairs for her mistress's suitcase. Her eyes were red, as if she had been crying.

Meissner and the countess did not say good-by to each other. Without looking at him she left the car and ran up the stairs followed by the maid. He got out of the car, saluted, and watched her till she had disappeared into the house and the heavy oak door had closed behind her.

On the drive back to the main road they again passed the old count. No greetings were exchanged, but as if the sight of the countess's father brought the thought to his mind, Meissner said suddenly to Hans, over his shoulder: "She wants me to marry her."

Hans knew instantly that Meissner was lying; that it was not she who wanted to marry him, but the other way around. It was Meissner who had proposed, and she who had refused. Hans wondered whether she loved or hated him, and tried to imagine how the two had spent the night.



He would indeed have liked to have a fine girl like that to play with, just to show her that she was not so fine after all. Strange, how the countess and Leni, different though they were, yet had something in common. Or was it only the nature of women, ridiculous, or not logical, or whatever it was, that made them so difficult as soon as one took them seriously?

Half an hour later, at the entrance of the factory barracks in Dresden, Meissner dropped Hans off, saying: "Have a nice furlough. Come to see me before you go back to the front," and without waiting for a reply drove on down the road that Hans had trod in the rain the day before.

Hans did not find Leni at the barracks as he had expected. The old actress told him that she had gone home on vacation, home to the village. No, she had left no message for him.

This made him furious. If Leni thought he would run after her, she was mistaken, he determined. He had had enough of this. The next SS man he met would tell him where to find some pretty girl who knew what a soldier on furlough wanted.

He went to his brother-in-law's apartment to see his mother and to shave himself. His father opened the door, a newspaper in his hand. They did not speak to each other. The door to the room in which Hans's mother ought to have been asleep now stood open, and the bed was empty.

"Where is Mother?" Han inquired.

"What do you want from her?"

"Nothing."

The old man disappeared into his room; Hans began to look around for his brother-in-law's shaving things. When he could not find them he went into his father's room and asked: "Do you know where Karl keeps his razor?"

The old man sat at his neatly arranged desk, cutting an

item out of the newspaper. He interrupted his work to point toward the cupboard above the washstand. "There is no soap," he remarked.

He was very pale, like a man at the point of exhaustion, and this gave Hans all at once a feeling that stuck like a lump in his throat. And it was indeed a queer situation: it must have been more than ten years since he had been alone with his father.

"When is Mother coming back?" Hans asked.

It took time until the old man answered: "Perhaps never. She is trying to see her sister."

"Aunt Frieda? Why?"

"She is in prison."

The old man handed Hans the newspaper clipping; under the heading "Traitors Punished" it ran:

Five German women from villages located in the mountains of the Ore district, Johanna Klinger, Ernestine Schmiedel, Sophie Metzger, Frieda Krantz, and Frieda Siefert were each condemned yesterday to six years of hard labor in jail for providing shelter for eight Jewish children whose parents had been arrested to be sent to concentration camps in Poland, and for pretending that the children in question were their own. In addition to this, these German peasant women had kept in constant contact with the Jewish parents of the children and had even sent them food.

Aunt Frieda was many years younger than his mother—Hans remembered her as a beautiful woman. As an adolescent boy he had for a while imagined himself in love with her.

"I will talk to Captain Meissner about it," he said, putting the clipping back on his father's desk. "Maybe I can get her out. But why does she have to do things like that? We must be ruthless. The more ruthless we are, the shorter the war, the fewer . . ."

The way in which his father looked at him brought him

up short. The old man gathered all his strength together and rose to his full height. At first his voice trembled but, as he spoke, it became firm and sharp.

"You will do nothing of the kind," the old man said. "We want no favors from your murdering friends. Nor from you either. I hoped the war would teach you a lesson. But you are still what you were: a Nazi. We want to have nothing to do with you. And now get out of here. Get out. I never want to see you again."

For a moment Hans did not know what to do. Then he threw the razor onto the washstand and left.

Dusk was falling when Hans came out of a little tavern where he had been drinking in company with another furlougher who also had not quite known what to do with his day. The schnapps had been throat-cutting but heart-warming stuff, and he was in high spirits. In his pocket he had the address of a place where he would have a good time. He was not really drunk but the schnapps made him think faster and sharper, and he was convinced that there was no chance of securing a duplicate furlough paper in his own name. Every attempt to get one would entangle him in the tightly woven web of control. The best thing would be to return to the front. The homeland was a disappointment, anyhow.

But before going back to be killed he wanted to have a little fun. That little wench in Berlin had called him a "front swine." A descriptive expression, and true. A front swine he was, and nothing else, while Meissner had become a "Herr," hobnobbing with the aristocracy. Funny, but going back to the front would really be like going home now. Nothing could happen to him there—except that he might be killed.

To have fun for a day or two. And perhaps to settle the score with Leni before leaving. Maybe. Unless he could find a girl who would make him forget Leni, and of whom

he could dream later on during the long nights at the front. A girl who could give him the illusion of love. To love—for that he had shot the comrade; for that he had stolen his furlough. Because he had longed to be tender with Leni and to say silly things. What a fool he had been! Yet one cannot go on indefinitely killing without feeling at some point the need to love. No man could.

As he turned a corner, an elderly, neatly dressed woman was suddenly at his side, speaking in a whisper. She offered all kinds of things for sale, and though her prices were exorbitant, he followed her into a shadowy doorway. There, like a stage magician, she produced seemingly from nowhere an amazing collection of wares, a pound of real coffee, cigarettes, headache powders, sleeping powders, buttons, needles, a pair of almost new silk stockings, two bottles of liquor—then quickly stored them away again in the invisible pockets of her clothes.

Hans bought a piece of soap for his mother and some cigarettes. He had to laugh out loud when the woman walked off with the dignified air of an absent-minded high-school teacher. He wondered why Meissner was unable to stop this illegal trading. "Or is he getting a cut?" was the afterthought, as certain practices of his own stormtrooper days came to mind.

"I mustn't get tight, I mustn't think things like that," Hans admonished himself. He talked too much when drunk, and talk was dangerous. Marching briskly and breathing deeply, he tried now to counteract his intoxication. And after a few blocks the mellowness that had taken hold of him slowly dissolved. Things moved into their normal perspective again. And indeed what was the use of thinking faster and sharper? That too was dangerous. Because it only made one unhappy.

The dimout became so complete that he began to have trouble in reading the street names. Twice he was helped by passers-by, but the farther he went the more deserted

the streets became. He was entering the more well-to-do neighborhood described by the man in the tavern from whom he had received the address. He had offered a choice between a cheap place and a luxurious one but Hans had paid no attention to his drinking companion's warnings about expense. Luxurious and expensive—that was just what he wanted, even if it cost all of his savings. Thoughts of the alluring countess floated into his mind.

Hans's imaginings were interrupted sharply by a girl coming out of a sidestreet ahead of him, going his way. When she passed beneath the pale light of a street lamp he could see her delicate figure distinctly. Quickening his pace he moved nearer, and she turned her head around furtively, as if afraid. He could hear her steps now; short, quick taps on the pavement, succeeding each other with increasing rapidity like a frightened heartbeat.

As the girl passed the next lamp he observed her legs. They were as he liked them, long and slender. But he was even more attracted by her high heels. Funny, the start they gave him! And then he remembered. On the way back from the front, looking out of the window of the train at a desolate, rainswept freight yard somewhere in Poland, he had seen a half-starved woman—the first one in many months—crossing the numerous tracks. Lifting her feet wearily she had caught one heel on a rail and had almost fallen. The lines of the elegant heels, their impracticality—especially in walking across the tracks of a freight yard—the utter senselessness of the touch of luxury which they imparted to the silent picture of desolation and destruction, had fascinated him. And now again, watching the girl in front of him, the foolishly high heels seemed to him the sum total of everything that was not war. . . .

The girl turned into a sidestreet that would have taken him out of his way. He was just persuading himself not to follow her, not to lose time in an uncertain adventure,

when she came running back around the corner and, after a moment's hesitation, approached him.

"Could you see me home, Sergeant?" she asked breathlessly. "There are people coming whom I'm afraid of . . . we are not far from where I live."

"Gladly, Fräulein," he answered, stepping to her side, just as four or five dark figures appeared at the street-corner. They stopped abruptly when they saw that the girl was not alone, then crossed to the other side of the street, and vanished into the blackness.

"Thank you ever so much," said the girl.

"Who are they?" queried Hans.

"Why, hoodlums," she answered in a tone of astonishment.

"I've just come home on a furlough from the front," he said. "Isn't it safe for a girl to go home alone?"

"Not any more. Since the total mobilization many things have changed."

"What does the total mobilization have to do with this?"

The girl stopped under a street lamp and looked at him. Her face disappointed him. Not that her features were in any way unpleasing—and she could not have been more than twenty or twenty-two. But he was struck by an unapproachable seriousness that spoke out of her great dark eyes. Within seconds he measured the distance between his intentions and this girl's whole being. There was something about her that made him feel instantly that he would never dare touch her.

She walked on without giving him the slightest inkling of how he had impressed her. But from the answer he received to his question he realized that she had decided to be careful.

"It is quite understandable," she said, and went on to quote the official phrases: "Everybody has to work for the war, has to give everything he has left to the war—time,

strength, everything. Such people are on the lookout for people who act as if there were no war going on, and I was afraid they might take me for what is called a parasite on account of the clothes I'm wearing. They are my last decent things, and I never put them on. But today I had to, for the final examination."

"What examination?" he asked.

"I'm a music student. And now the conservatory has been ordered closed." There was a note of grief in the words, though she expressed them without any intonation.

"But you aren't dressed luxuriously," Hans said after glancing at her simple though well-cut coat. "Why should they attack you?"

"Isn't luxury a relative thing?" the girl asked. "Many well-dressed people have been attacked these last weeks. That way life is made very unpleasant for people who think they can continue their useless private lives."

Hans thought that she was again quoting. And he caught the implication that the whole thing was part of the total mobilization drive. He could see Meissner organizing "spontaneous" actions—the just and holy wrath of the common people. . . .

"You mean that the SS . . ."

"I didn't mention the SS," she interrupted him.

"No, you did not," he assured her, and wanted to add that she need not fear him. Yet why should he trust her any more than she him?

"Did you pass your examination?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Yes." This yes was like a period, concluding the entire conversation.

He accepted it as such and began to wonder, as they silently walked on, how much farther she would take him out of his way.

A little man whom the girl called uncle, and who called

her "dear Louise," was standing in front of a house, on the lookout. He obviously did not like her not being alone, but when he heard that Hans had protected her and that he was a furlougher just arrived from Russia, he changed his manner and would not let Hans go. He urged him into the house. In the entrance hall hung large pictures of Nazi leaders; in the parlor a gold-framed portrait of the Fuehrer was flanked by swastikas. The girl's uncle was quick in his movements, constantly showing his yellow teeth, like a small, gray-haired monkey. One of the party profiteers, Hans thought, remembering the meeting in Berlin.

His wife came out of the kitchen, shouting at the girl for being late, then interrupted herself quickly at sight of the stranger, her expression changing from anger to pleasure. She was blonde, tall and voluptuous, with remnants of beauty in a tired face that she tried to rejuvenate with a girlish make-up. She wore some kind of severe uniform, but gave Hans, who had once worked as a stage-hand, the impression of an actress playing a comedy part.

"Delighted to have you, Sergeant," the woman cried, accompanying her words with a gesture that filled the room. "I am dressed for war work. I'm the new leader of the fire brigade of our street. Have to go on duty in a few minutes. You see, the home front is ready too. Let the English come!"

"Better not call them," Hans said dryly and with more unfriendliness than he intended. But the woman smiled and, turning to a pale, bony girl who had stepped silently from behind, remarked: "This is my daughter, Gudrun."

The girl was dressed in the same sort of uniform as her mother; she stood at attention for a moment, then, in a colorless voice, whined: "Mother, I'm hungry, and we have to hurry up." She had a letter in her hand which she handed to Louise, who seemed to sense what Hans thought of her relatives. In her flushed embarrassment she looked much softer, but he still thought her much too solemn for him.



The letter was an official one. Uncle, aunt, and daughter watched Louise tear open the envelope in silent suspense. Bad news. She began to tremble and became as white as chalk. Then she said, as if not believing it: "My appeal has been refused."

Gudrun spoke first, without a second's hesitation: "Of course, everybody has to do war work." Her dreary tone was sharpened by a thinly veiled and vicious satisfaction, it seemed to Hans, who had disliked her at first sight.

"You will just have to take care of your hands," said the woman. "I was not used to hard work either, but I've learned it," she continued, to Hans. "What training I went through! Repairing fire engines, breaking into houses, smashing glass windows with bare hands; but nothing happened to them, see!" She spread out her fingers and waved her hands in self-admiration.

"But it is different with *my* hands," the girl whispered. "I've trained them for so many years; they have to remain sensitive. And now they order me to work in a factory!"

"Of course, you could have a child," Gudrun whined again. "Then you would get an exemption."

They moved into the dining room, heavily furnished in oak. The aunt called out, "Anuschka! Anuschka!" in a military tone, as if she were a sergeant herself. A black-haired girl appeared from the kitchen carrying a big plate laden with sausages and potatoes. She had red, swollen eyes in a haggard face, and was sobbing. "Of course, she is Polish," Gudrun explained to Hans as if he could not have seen it himself. She started every sentence with "of course." He could have cut her throat.

"I told you to stop this eternal crying," the woman snapped angrily. Turning to Hans she continued in the grand style she had obviously chosen for the occasion: "She is an orphan. We have taken her into our house. But she is ungrateful, uncivilized, and lazy, crying all the time. It is difficult to run a big house with such help."

"Sorry there is no beer," said the uncle. He had not spoken a word since his wife's appearance.

Louise looked up from her letter and said quietly: "Anuschka is crying because she is unhappy and homesick. She is not lazy, but dead tired. She does not get enough to eat and has too much work to do."

The woman opened her mouth, as did her daughter, in utter astonishment. At that moment a car blew its horn and both of them, without saying a word, bent over their food, bolting the sausages.

"Don't keep them waiting," the uncle said, obviously eager to get them out of the house.

The two women left, but not before the girl's mother had invited Hans to come again and tell them about the "heroic fight of our invincible soldiers in Russia." At the door she turned. "Louise," she said sharply, "I think some real work will do you good."

As soon as the two were out of the house the uncle came to life again. "My wife is a fool and my daughter an idiot," he said. He tried to caress Louise's hand but she withdrew it quickly. She had not touched her food and was re-reading the letter. Hans moved restlessly and was about to thank them for the supper and leave, when a quick glance from the girl begged him to stay.

"This is only a routine letter," her uncle said. "I will personally intervene at the mobilization board. There are exceptions for artists. Don't worry, dear Louise."

Hans urged the girl to eat and she then took a few bites, giving him a tired little smile when he praised her as if she were a child that was at last behaving. He smiled back, but noticed that her uncle watched him with growing resentment. The uncle's face had changed completely; the monkey-like expression had disappeared. He was pressing his colorless lips together tightly, and his yellow teeth no longer showed. With him one has to be careful, Hans thought. He's nobody's fool.

A trace of vain satisfaction flickered over the man's face, as if he knew what Hans was thinking. And looking at the Iron Cross first class on Hans's tunic, he asked in a conciliatory tone: "Where did you get the cross?"

"At Sevastopol."

The question had been merely a feeler. Hans became aware of this when the little man started to pump him about conditions at the front. He did it slyly, sandwiching his questions between thick layers of official phraseology which he seemed to use with conviction: "There is no alternative to victory." "Our enemies are out to annihilate the German people." "Nazis and non-Nazis, we are all in the same boat." Then would follow the question: "Judging from your healthy looks, you front soldiers must be in good shape?" Or he would say: "No sacrifice is too big. The Fuehrer says we will win the war, nobody dares doubt his word. The enemy is circulating rumors about mutiny and desertions of German soldiers. Can you beat that?"

Hans gave short, guarded answers: "Yes, we are in good shape." "Never heard of a case of desertion." This he announced although he himself during the retreat from the Volga had commanded an execution platoon that had given short shrift to a score of Austrians who had shot their German officers. But when the uncle asked, "Is it true that the Russians are getting more and more American planes?" Hans cut him short: "We have orders not to talk about the front."

"Oh, I didn't mean to ask anything you are not permitted to talk about; please excuse me." The man had become flustered; realizing that he had given away his anxiety, he was glad to end the conversation.

Into the ensuing silence the girl broke with: "How long can the war still last? That's all I want to know."

"Till one side has won," Hans answered.

"That's simple, that's right," her uncle bleated in a high voice. "And we shall win it."

"Everything decent is being destroyed," the girl went on. "Germany is sick, the world is sick. I'm ashamed of the way human beings behave. I'm ashamed."

"Don't listen to her. She is upset on account of the letter. Louise is an artist; she does not know what she's saying."

The excuses for the girl's remarks bubbled out of the little man's mouth, the yellow teeth getting in the way of his words. He proceeded to assure his niece once more that he would get her a deferment from the labor draft. And bending closer to her he stroked her hair in a pseudo-paternal manner. But he stopped when he noticed that Hans was watching him with narrowed eyes.

"She knew what she was saying, and she has courage," Hans said. The girl raised her head and looked at him in astonishment. But he continued, now addressing his words to her: "But you have illusions. I have none. It's kill or be killed. There is no other way."

"Right again!" said her uncle, striking the table with his fist. The girl stared at Hans in horror.

At that moment the telephone rang in the hall. The uncle jumped up and ran out of the room. A minute later he was back, in hat and coat.

"I'm a member of the city administration," he explained. "The district commander of the SS is calling an emergency meeting. Evacués from Berlin are arriving and have to be quartered. I must go." Yet he waited.

Hans got up, remained standing at the table, and gave no sign of intending to leave with him. For a moment their eyes met. The little man was tormented by jealousy.

"Captain Meissner does not like to wait," Hans said coldly.

The man stared at him. "You know Captain Meissner?"

"In the old days we served together in the same storm troop."

"Well, you are right, he is very punctual; I have to hurry." And, recovering from surprise, the little man

added: "Captain Meissner does not waste many words, either. I hope to be back shortly. *Heil Hitler!*" He rushed out of the house.

As soon as the front door had closed the girl got up from the table. After a moment's hesitation she said to Hans: "Let's go upstairs to my room."

They entered a large, almost bare room in the attic. The windows, cut into the slanting ceiling, were closely curtained with black material that hung like funeral bunting, sharply dividing the whitewashed walls. The furniture consisted of a large piano, half-filled bookshelves, a couch, a desk, a few chairs. There could have been twice as much furniture and the room would still have been empty. There was only one picture: a large photograph of Beethoven's death mask. It dominated the room until the girl turned off the sharp ceiling light, leaving on only a small, shaded lamp.

Hans leaned against a wall. The girl paced up and down the room, saying nothing. He waited.

She stopped in front of him and looked at him as if ready to say much. But she wandered away again, without a word, into the shadows of the far end of the room, where she sat down at the piano. He still waited.

After a while she started to play.

It came to Hans as an anti-climax. Perhaps he was too impatient, but instead of things taking the turn he had planned, he now had to listen to music. It brought back to him the boredom he had suffered as a schoolboy in his mathematics classes. He had never understood what on earth the Fuehrer got out of this sort of pastime.

He was thinking of getting away before he lost his temper and showed the girl that he was no fool, when all at once her playing began to interest him. He saw a storm-swept landscape, mountains and rivers, green forests and

golden fields glowing in a strange light. Then an even deeper sensation took hold of him. It was as if everything were in its place—immovable, clean, and understandable. And the wonder of it was that he himself seemed to belong; that he too was in his place. . . .

"I must still be drunk," he thought, as a succession of shrill notes, entirely incomprehensible to him, made him start. The girl stopped playing abruptly, ending on an insane and violent note. And in the sudden stillness he heard her crying.

He suppressed the impulse to go over to her and console her. It was better that she get rid of the tears. Besides, it was not late and he had time.

As he had expected, she calmed down and came across the room. He did not say a word. Leaning against the wall, he waited. Waiting silently was always effective with women.

"Please, go now," the girl said. "I thank you once more for seeing me home."

He did not answer or move.

"Please," she said.

Perhaps he should have left. But he had begun to like her. She had character. She had courage and passion. She was a fine girl. Not one of those ever-ready ones, who were no better than he himself. She was too serious, but perhaps he could change that. And there was a strength in her that challenged him. She was like a Russian girl. Sending him away just like that!

"If you won't go, I shall." The girl crossed to the door but he was faster and blocked the way.

"You stay right here!" he ordered.

The girl retreated, slowly stepping backward, without letting Hans out of her sight. The tap of her high heels sounded soft on the carpet and hard on the bare floor before she reached the bookshelves.

It was so still that he could hear her breathe. He waited for her next move. Suddenly he could not bear the silence any longer.

"Forget that damned letter," he said. "Your uncle will fix it so that you won't have to work in a factory."

"Yes. If I pay his price." She said it coldly, matter-of-factly. It surprised him. Until this moment he had thought her an innocent romantic. Now she spoke as if she knew exactly what was what in this world.

"And will you pay?"

"No."

"What will you do?"

Again she did not answer. Hans had the feeling that he was off on a wrong start, that this kind of talk would get him nowhere. It would have been so simple to use force. But that was not what he wanted. She must give him a kind word, and be honestly nice because she liked him. Why didn't she come over to him, ruffle his hair, smile? Then he would even have left if she asked him to. If only she would trust him.

The shrill sound of whistles in the street below penetrated to the room. A car sped past the house. Angry voices rang out; again the sound of whistles; then silence.

"What was that?"

"My aunt working with her crew."

"She is a bitch."

"She is very unhappy. And crazy. And cruel. Everybody is today."

Now she was defending her aunt. It was hard to understand. What was wrong with this girl?

"She wanted to adopt a child," she went on. "Women with children under six don't have to work. She put an ad in the paper to find a child. But hundreds of others did the same thing and many were arrested. Uncle was against it, anyway, and made a better arrangement——"

"I don't want to know," Hans interrupted her. "When

we soldiers return, we'll put things in order. I know more than you. But it's too late for arguments. It's kill or be killed."

The girl came toward him. "That is not true!"

"So! It is not true! But if you go out on the street and say out loud what you think you will be killed. And if you want people to be of your opinion, you have to start with killing those who are against you. Might is right."

"You speak like a Nazi!"

"Yes, I am one!" He became furious. Was there no way for a furlougher to have a nice time? "Why did you take me up here with you? You knew we were alone in the house."

"Because I was insane," she said, staring at him. And then she laughed. She suddenly laughed. He had not heard her laugh as yet. He remembered her tired little smile at the table when he had made her eat. A sweet smile. But it was not natural, the way she laughed now. It sounded shrill and senseless, like the notes on which she had stopped playing.

"Shut up!" he shouted, and she fell silent.

"Excuse me," he said after a pause, not knowing what made him apologize. He had had enough of playing cat-and-mouse.

He was about to step over to her and take her into his arms when the front door was loudly opened and closed.

"Your uncle is back."

"No. It is my aunt. Her job is a sham that saves her from the labor draft."

Hans thought of his old mother. It was as always: the poor and decent had to carry the whole load.

They listened. The woman and Gudrun were moving about the house. Then they heard the aunt calling, "Anuschka! Anuschka!"

Footsteps were approaching from the staircase. The girl switched on the sharp ceiling light. He walked away from



her. When he turned she was looking at her hands, holding them up in mid-air and moving the fingers as if she were playing the piano. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"What will you do?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered softly.

A knock on the door, and Gudrun was standing in the room.

"I'm just leaving," said Hans, going past her and down the stairs. As he stopped on the next landing, thinking that he ought to say a word of good-by to the girl, he heard Gudrun ask her in her dreary voice: "Louise, are you going to have a child?"

Downstairs the woman tried to hold him back, but gave up quickly when she noticed the manner in which he grabbed his coat. He left the house without a word.

It was raining. He pulled up his collar and walked for quite a while in the wrong direction before he realized it and turned back. When he passed the girl's house, he heard her playing. She must have opened a window. Her music tolled out into the night, clear and powerful, as if she were sending a message over the whole earth.

She was playing the same piece that had made him see into another universe, where everything was in its place, immovable, clean, and understandable. And he had felt a wonder that he himself belonged to it, that he too was in his place. . . .

He spat on the pavement and clutched the slip of paper with the address of the house where he had wanted to go in the first place. There would be whores who would not bother him with their souls.

## V

ERZGEBIRGE is the name of the chain of high rock that separates Germany from northwestern Bohemia, or "The Protectorate" as the Nazis called the heart-shaped country in the heart of Europe, after they invaded it in 1939. The crest of the range which for many centuries has been the frontier between the two countries runs west to east, slightly to the northeast. From peaks and from clearings in the dense forests on the saddles, there are views far into both lands. To the north the plains of Saxony (where Napoleon suffered defeat) and its industrial cities lie in an ever present haze, except on clear winter days, which are rare. To the south the range descends steeply to the plateau of Bohemia. The southern view is the more beautiful. In the blue sheen of the horizon, people are said to have seen the towers and spires of *Zlata Praha*, Golden Prague, capital of Czechoslovakia.

It was night, and the Erzgebirge lay shrouded in darkness when the little train which Leni had caught at the last minute—after spending hours in getting her travel permit—chugged slowly up the steep grade to the village. The constant draught that swept the car with its broken windows grew colder and colder. The passengers—peasant women and a few soldiers—had long since stopped talking about foreign farmhands, war prisoners, and the weather. But now as everyone made ready for the arrival, a husky woman's voice, in a belligerent tone, shot a question into the darkness:

"How long will the war still last?"

"The war will last until Judgment Day," came the answer, after a pause. It sounded like blasphemy. The frightened peasant women crossed themselves quickly, while the

soldier who had answered laughed devilishly. It was the handsome corporal, the fellow who had smiled furtively at Leni as long as there had been light. The next moment she felt him move to her side; when the train stopped, he helped her out of the carriage and offered to carry her valise. But he did not insist, or molest her, when she declined; then he disappeared, with a flash of his white teeth, into the dark.

Leni walked through the dead, empty village in fear, as if walking in a cemetery at night. At the foot of the hill leading to the church she went down on one knee and said a short prayer—that she might have done the right thing, and that the war be ended long before Judgment Day. Straightening up she saw the door of the village priest's house open. For a moment the old man stood in the doorway, his tall figure outlined against the light from the room within, his white hair shining like a halo around his head. But presently the door closed and the house was dark again, and Leni did not know for sure whether she had really seen the priest, or had only imagined him standing there, making the sign of the cross over the mountains hidden in the darkness.

Her confusion deepened when a strange sound from afar caught her ear. Walking farther she soon distinguished the monotonous rise and fall of a sad song, sung by deep, male voices. It came from the direction of the old storehouse, whose sinister gray stone walls and huge iron door that never opened had been a frightening mystery to Leni as a child. There the war prisoners and foreign farmhands, of whom the women had talked on the train, must be shut up at night.

The song grew fainter and followed Leni as she left the village and walked steadily up the old mountain road. The outline of the range against the sky became sharper with every minute. The night's darkness lifted, and soon the moon began to rise over the crest of the range, flooding the landscape with a pale, greenish light.

Leni proceeded with increasing ease. Her light valise was no burden. She was breathing deeply of the clear fresh air, enjoying the beauty of the moonlit night, when suddenly her heart leaped into her throat. For in the distance she had caught sight of the old quarry, its white walls gleaming ghost-like across the meadows out of the deep blackness of the forest. In that quarry, on a moonlit night such as this, she had hidden as a little girl in a cart and watched Hans cut the "sign of the cross" into the hand of one of his followers.

A strong wind came sweeping out of the northern night and struck the mountains. The creaking sounds from the forest filled the air, intermingled with sad bits of the song which the wind brought along from the village below. Leni walked on faster; soon she began to run, driven by the fear that she would turn and go back to Hans, as her heart filled with pity for him. The hopelessness of his gesture as he had pressed both hands over his face in the quarry had touched her so deeply that she had never forgotten it, and now the recollection overcame her. She felt it her duty to return to him and to let him do with her as he wished. She felt that she was betraying him by deserting him when he needed her, leaving him alone in the bleak misery he had made of his life. But the more these emotions surged up in her, the harder she ran to escape the fate that had always seemed to be reaching out for her ever since that night in the quarry so many years ago. . . .

She tried to command herself, but the panic in her heart continued unabated. Although she was all alone on a wide shimmering slope flanked by black forest, she looked around with the feeling of being watched. And the thought occurred to her that her aunt too might have been taken away by the war, and that the house might be closed and empty. Then, coming out of a small ravine, she saw the house, its high roof sharply etched against the sky. The windows were dark, no light greeted her, but the chimney

was smoking, and Nero, the shepherd dog, barked—a single, long-drawn-out howl—then bounded down from the house steps toward her.

As she sat down at the roadside to catch her breath, Nero stood in front of her, wagging his tail and sniffing at the valise whose smooth straw reflected the moon like a mirror.

The front door opened and a tall woman stepped out into the moonlight, calling, "Nero! Nero!" in an agitated voice that ceased abruptly when she saw Leni quietly approaching.

Leni stopped and, softly and hesitatingly, said: "Good evening, Aunt Minna." The woman did not speak or move. On other occasions, her aunt, though not demonstrative by nature, had always shown her an affectionate welcome. Never before had she behaved in this way, simply staring at her niece, as if she would have preferred not to see her.

"Good evening," Leni repeated.

Aunt Minna still did not move. Her eyes had become narrow, her expression stern, even hostile. Finally she spoke—no greetings, only a sharp question: "Where do you come from in the middle of the night?"

Leni was at a loss what to think. "I got a vacation and came home," she answered.

"Vacation!" Her aunt repeated the word without the slightest inflection. After a pause she added, "Come in," and led the way.

Leni followed her into the house, which consisted of two rooms and a large kitchen where her aunt spent most of the time. Now she went into the living room proper. A kerosene lamp threw an uncertain circle of light on a big round table, leaving everything else in deep shadow; only the polished metal parts of the old-fashioned furniture shone faintly. The window curtains were tightly drawn. And Leni noticed the quick glance with which Aunt Minna scrutinized the room before turning to her.

"It's good to see you, Leni," she said at last.

"It's good to see you, Aunt Minna."

They embraced and kissed.

At that moment Leni heard the sound of the back door, as if someone were coming or going out. Her aunt released her, saying quickly: "I must have forgotten to close the door; the wind is making it slam," and she left the room.

Bewildered, Leni sat down in the nearest chair. The door did not slam a second time; she was sure it had not been idly slamming the first time. Then she heard her aunt open and close it loudly. It occurred to Leni that someone had been in the house and that her aunt did not want her to know it.

Aunt Minna returned, looking relieved, and asked if Leni was hungry or thirsty. Taking the lamp along to light them into the kitchen, she silently prepared a quick supper, breaking two eggs into a pan. When she saw Leni's astonished eyes, she said: "Over at the estate we still have everything."

The estate was the large place where the uncle had been gardener all his life, and the aunt had been for many years housekeeper. This fact, and the estate owner's influence in Berlin, had saved her from being drafted for war work in the city.

Leni ate with an appetite that only increased with the taste of the rare eggs, for she had eaten almost nothing all day. Opposite her, Aunt Minna sat down, watching. As soon as she saw that Leni had finished, and had taken a glass of water poured from an old blue pitcher, her aunt asked without any preliminaries: "How is it that you got a vacation when all vacations are canceled?"

Leni was bewildered by the tone of distrust. She stared at her aunt as if to find an explanation in the face that had always been like a mountain apple, round, hard, and healthy. The dark blue eyes were set deeply back of high

cheekbones, under black brows. Framed by strands of gray-ing hair parted in the middle and tied into a knot at the neck, it was a strong, serious face. But it appeared worried, fearful, suspicious. Yes, it was suspicion and some kind of fear that Leni had felt in her from the first moment, without being able to give it a name.

"Well, whom are you in with?" Aunt Minna asked impatiently.

Leni explained, telling of Hans's return and that she had quarreled with him. She supposed that he must have persuaded his protector, Captain Meissner, to grant her a leave.

Her aunt merely said: "I would be glad if you were through with that good-for-nothing."

Leni wanted to defend Hans. Yet instead she buried her head in her arms and wept.

Her aunt's face lit up, her hands moved across the table to stroke the girl's hair, but they did not touch her. And the expression of sympathy disappeared from her face as she asked: "Does he know where you are?"

"I left word for him where I am."

Aunt Minna looked at the girl without any expression for some time. "You are not through with him, not in your heart," and taking the lamp, without another word, she went into the bedroom. Leni followed, suddenly exhausted.

The aunt put out the lamp and pulled open the curtains. Outside moonlight lay on the meadows like a white sheet. In the dark blue sky the stars glittered.

They undressed in the darkness. After Leni had slipped into bed her aunt opened the window and stood listening. Leni sat up. Far to the north pale lightning crossed the sky, and, straining their ears, they heard far in the distance a repeated sound like thunder, only shorter, sharper, less rolling.

"The English are bombing Berlin," the aunt commented and turned to bed. "Good night," she added, and pulled the feather bed over her ears.

"Good night," said Leni.

She was accustomed to being at work at this time and could find no sleep, tired as she was. And she could not keep from straining her ears for the distant thunder-like sound, though she lay quietly, with closed eyes, breathing the cool fresh air that began to fill the room.

Aunt Minna also lay awake. After a while she became restless and sat up to listen. When she had lain down again, Leni took heart and said: "As I arrived I heard someone leave the house; and I saw how nervous you were. But whatever it is, you have nothing to fear from me."

There was no answer. Aunt Minna pretended to have fallen asleep. She does not trust me, Leni thought. Here too it is now like everywhere else.

And she said nothing more.

It was late next day, almost noon, when Leni stepped out of the house. She looked southward first, as every northerner instinctively does in his longing for the sun. She could not see the towers and spires of *Zlata Praha*, but the old burnt-out volcano—a huge black cone of rock—stood out clearly on the Bohemian plain. To the right and left of it the landscape glistened, beyond the cloud of dust and smoke that rose from the coal mines and factory towns at the foot of the range.

Leni drank in the view like a long, refreshing drink. Then she sat down on the little bench in front of the house and looked northward over the village. The main street was empty—not a soul, not an animal, not a cart. The doors and windows of the small one-story houses were closed and boarded up. All this made the village look strangely different. Only the little old church on the hill was still the same. St. George's golden curls and the tip of his spear blinked in the sun, and so did the stained glass windows and the cross atop the bell tower. The quietness of the village was much more complete than in normal times, and



of a different sort altogether. A profound peacefulness seemed to engulf it.

The trees, the meadows, and the sky are still the same, Leni thought. That which had been taken away from her world, human activity, she missed far less than she enjoyed what had been added to it, the intense stillness and loneliness. She saw her entire life spread out before her. On the poorer side of the village she could see between the trees the shingled roof under which she had grown up, until she had lost her parents and her aunt had taken her in. Farther down stood the little railway station where so many things had happened, happy and sad. From there she had traveled for the first time on the railroad, dressed all in white, for her first visit to the Dresden Zoo. There she had said good-by to her brother when he went into the army, shortly before the outbreak of the war, never to return. On the slope above the station stood the friendly little villa of the old actress; the windows were all closed now, but the wooden fence was still gleaming white. There Leni had worked during one summer as a maid.

Out of the western forest a white banner of smoke rose. It came from the chimney of the big house on the estate. As a child Leni had been taken there several times by her aunt to play with the owner's boy, a brat who always wanted to talk about nasty things and was afraid to climb trees. And on the other side of the clearing, at the rim of the vast forest called Devil's Wood, was the quarry.

Leni rose from the bench and walked up the road to the crest of the ridge, and over it as far as the great, weather-beaten cross whence the view stretched down over the slopes of the Bohemian side. Half a mile away the two former customs houses, the German and the Czech—little dull buildings flanked by empty flagpoles—yawned at each other. There she had gone through with her frontier pass on a beautiful summer day when the Czechs were having an automobile race, and the whole village had turned out

to watch their little sturdy cars climb up the difficult mountain road, turn and race down. How excited and happy they had all been!

In the middle of the race Hans had appeared at her side and looked at her instead of at the cars. Then he had taken her by the hand and led her away from the crowd till they were out of sight in a little valley. There they had sat down in the meadow and looked at each other for a long time without saying a word. In his open white shirt and shorts (he could not have passed the frontier in his brown uniform) he had looked so much like the small boy of the quarry. They had kissed, and he had said: "You've grown to be a wonderful girl, Leni." And a little later: "I love you, Leni." And then she said: "I have loved you since I was a child." But when he had wanted to take her into the forest she had not gone with him. . . .

Slowly Leni walked back to her aunt's house. As she reached the crest she stopped abruptly, then quickly stepped behind a bit of old stone wall. At the door of the house stood two motorcycles. Presently two SS men came out of the house and sped down to the village. There, in the square, army trucks were parked. Past the huge iron door of the old warehouse a long column of war prisoners was being marched toward the village.

Leni waited till the cyclists had reached the foot of the hill, then she rushed down the slope and into the house, looking for a sign of what the men had been doing inside. On the kitchen table she found a slip of paper informing the owner of the house that one room had been requisitioned by the district command of the SS. The reason for the requisition was not given.

From the relief Leni felt after reading the official note, she realized the fear that had seized her at sight of the SS men. She thought they had come for her without asking herself why—she had been obsessed with the idea that they had come to arrest her. Her knees were still shaking when she

started down to the village. There the war prisoners were tearing the barricading boards from windows and doors on house after house. The sound of splintering wood was borne upward on the light wind.

When Leni arrived at the square she saw two SS officers enter the priest's house. She quickly decided to postpone an intended visit to the priest, who would have been glad to see her and to explain why the houses were being opened while the owners were away. (They had been promised that nothing would be touched while they were at work in the war plants, but now it looked as if the whole village had been requisitioned.)

There was no one in the parked trucks, which were loaded heavily with army cots. When Leni went around to the other side of them she was confronted by a group of war prisoners who stared at her. Even if she had felt like it, she could not have questioned them, for it was strictly forbidden—especially for girls—to speak to war prisoners; and a guard was approaching.

It was only now that Leni became aware of the sensation that her appearance in the village was creating. The guards posted on the street corners were beckoning and shouting at her. The approaching guard made her a proposal to meet at night. The hungry eyes of the silent war prisoners were devouring her. She became aware that she was a girl alone, in the middle of the village, surrounded on all sides by lonely men. In sudden fear she turned and ran.

After she had passed a few houses a guard barred her way. It was the handsome soldier from the train. He lowered his rifle and commanded "Halt!" but his white teeth flashed in a laugh.

"Please let me pass!" she begged breathlessly.

"Why are you running? What have you done?" The soldier asked with mock severity, but continued in a friendly tone, "You don't have to be afraid of the boys in the daytime, but watch out after dark. They haven't seen a girl

for months. It was foolish of you last night to walk up the road alone."

Leni stared at him. Now she understood that queer feeling—as if someone she could not see had been behind her. "You followed me?" she asked.

"I did," the soldier answered. "I was looking after you—but don't do it again. I may not be at hand."

"Thanks," she said and walked on. After a few steps she turned: "Why are the houses being opened?"

"We don't know. Orders are to put them in condition. I guess convalescent soldiers will be quartered here, or air-raid évacués. Berlin is being evacuated."

"Berlin is being evacuated," Leni repeated.

There had been rumors that the capital of the Reich had suffered much more heavily under the air bombardment than was officially admitted. But there were so many rumors—and never a possibility of verifying them! Travel had been drastically curtailed, and general conditions made it impossible even to move freely within one city. Districts were cut off from districts. The continual overwork, fourteen and fifteen hours a day, left neither energy nor time for anything besides the most immediate needs, the attempt to get food and soap and sleep.

"Thousands have been killed, hundreds of thousands are homeless," the soldier continued. "The English are paying back with interest what we have done to them." When he realized what he had said an expression of uneasiness came into his face.

Leni quickly stepped close to him, grasping the hand that did not hold the rifle and pressed it, looking straight into his eyes. Then she turned away.

In the square the command was being given to unload the army cots from the trucks.

For two days and nights a thick rain, lashed by a cold, sharp wind, fell incessantly from the low sky. After the

one spring-like day that had greeted and delighted her on the morning after her arrival, Leni had felt more tired than after a night's work in the ammunition plant. "You aren't used to our strong air any more," her aunt explained. But there was more to it than that.

The sudden change in her sleeping time had upset Leni, so that she was now unable to fall asleep at night, or she dozed off only to wake up again and lie for hours with open eyes. Then she would sleep till late in the day and, after getting up, could do nothing except sit at the window like an invalid. For hours she watched the wild play of the clouds driven by the wind against the mountain range. They were so dense that she seldom got even a glimpse of the village below.

She enjoyed being alone, alone for the first time in many months. It was beautifully quiet in the house. There was no one to give orders, no one to intrude. She listened to the howling storm and to the occasional cries of a raven. And always she waited in hope and anxiety that Hans would come.

Indeed she thought about him every waking hour, and when she slept she dreamt of him. Often it was the same dream: they were sitting together quietly, not talking, just holding hands. But when she opened her eyes and the dream was gone, she realized that she would have to struggle with him before things could ever really be that way. He had wanted only the one thing . . . he could not wait even a little while. She ought to have told him that he would have to undo his whole life and start anew. That was the only way—if there was a way. But would she be able to make him understand?

On her third day—the second of the big rain—Leni awoke early in the morning. She judged that Aunt Minna was still in the kitchen. Then Leni heard her go into the shed behind the house, where the dry wood was stored. But she did not come back; not for so long a time that Leni

sat up, afraid that something might have happened. She was about to leave her bed when the shed door creaked again, then the back door, and her aunt returned, throwing logs of wood onto the kitchen floor. Nevertheless a queer impression persisted in Leni's mind and she remembered the strange incident of the night of her arrival—she had been sure that someone had left the house secretly although her aunt had insisted that it was the wind slamming the back door.

Before Aunt Minna left—she went to the estate every day at the same hour, rain or shine—she came into the bedroom and stepped to the foot of the bed and looked down at Leni who pretended to be still asleep. Then something curious happened. Aunt Minna smiled—smiled as a mother smiles at her sleeping child. After she was gone, Leni wept tears into her pillow, but they were tears that did not hurt.

The same day, in the afternoon, the gray figure of a soldier coming up the road appeared suddenly in the fog and rain. Her heart beat wildly for a moment, but it turned out to be only her handsome protector with the flashing teeth. Not quite knowing why she did it, Leni quickly bolted the doors, hid behind a curtain and did not answer the knock on the front door. The soldier then tried the back door and peered through the windows, but finally gave it up. Yet instead of going away he looked down the road toward the village and up to the crest of the range, as if to make sure that no one was around. Then he slipped quickly into the shed behind the house. He remained there for quite a while, just as Aunt Minna had done in the morning. When he came out there was a new expression on his face.

Leni had an idea of what her aunt and now the soldier had been doing in the woodshed. Though it was none of her business, an irresistible urge compelled her to explore. So she waited until she was certain that the soldier had gone far down the road, then quickly and silently,

though there was no one to see or hear her, she went into the shed. It was half dark and dusty, filled with tools and wood. There was no sign of anything else, yet somewhere . . . She did not dare touch the tools or move the logs, but she strained her eyes, scrutinizing every inch. And the less she found the more convinced she was that her surmise was correct.

Her aunt, upon coming home in the evening, said to Leni: "You must have slept well this afternoon. They sent a soldier up to tell us that the *évacués* are expected tomorrow—they are sending us a mother and three children. But you didn't hear him."

"Yes, I slept the whole afternoon," Leni answered. But instantly she was gripped by a disquieting thought: What if the soldier had been spying on her aunt? Oughtn't she to tell her that he had gone into the woodshed? And that he had come out with an air of satisfaction? He did not look suspicious, but one never knew. Now, however, after saying that she had slept all afternoon, how could she admit that she had seen the soldier?

There was an alternative: to tell the whole truth; simply to say she suspected that a short-wave radio was hidden in the shed. Leni was on the verge of confessing and of assuring her aunt that she herself belonged to a group that listened to foreign broadcasts. But she had sworn to tell no one, absolutely no one, under no circumstances.

The two women had now to clear out the requisitioned living room and make it ready for the *évacués*. They carried out the upholstered chairs and placed them in the bedroom, then the family photographs, and two still-lifes painted by the uncle, who had been an enthusiastic amateur. The big round table, the chest of drawers, and the old-fashioned sofa were too heavy to be moved; they would have to get some men to help them the next day.

During dinner, and afterwards, Leni had been racking her brain as to how she might, without giving herself away,

hint to her aunt that the soldier had been in the shed. "Now that I think of it," she hazarded, "I must have been wakened by the soldier after all, for it's queer, but I seem to remember somebody's going to the shed. Perhaps I was dreaming."

She did not dare look at her aunt while speaking. Then she heard the aunt pause in what she was doing, as if she wanted to say something. But Aunt Minna did not. There was a moment of deep silence between them; then they went on with their work.

They removed the contents from all the drawers of the chest, the coffee set which was her aunt's most cherished wedding present, and the many little odds and ends that collect during a lifetime and have no value at all yet mean so much. When they were through, the room seemed bare and desolate. Aunt Minna brought back the still-lives and put them on the wall again. "The children may like them," she said.

The rain had stopped. The sound of the lashing torrent against the windows and the roof was no more. They became aware of the sudden stillness and for a moment did not move. Then Aunt Minna opened the window wide and stood there listening, as on the night of Leni's arrival, while the air raid on Berlin was in progress.

She came over to Leni and sat down beside her. After a short pause she spoke: "You lied to me, Leni. You saw the soldier go into the shed. But you can trust him. And I want to tell you that we have got word from the city that we can trust *you*. But don't tell me anything. And I won't tell you anything. We shall both be safer that way."

Leni sat up and embraced her aunt and drew her close to her heart.

The following morning was bright and windy. Between huge white clouds in an ever-changing sky the sun came in and out continually. A flock of ravens had gathered on



the stone wall high up on the saddle of the mountain and filled the air with hoarse and lively conversation.

It was still early when two soldiers in a small army truck brought to the house an iron bedstead, three cots, a simple white table and three kitchen chairs. They moved the heavy furniture from the requisitioned room into the bedroom, which now looked like a furniture store. There were no blankets for the évacués. "We'll help them out," said Aunt Minna. When she heard that there were no blankets at all for anyone, she advised the soldiers to have a look in the big house of the estate. "We should like to," one soldier said, "but orders are to keep hands off the estate."

"It is reserved for a hospital," the other soldier said.

"It is reserved for week-end guests," the aunt muttered, after the soldiers were out of the house.

At about ten o'clock a swastika was hoisted in the village square. A few minutes later Leni and her aunt, watching from the front of their house, saw two long trains full of évacués pull into the station. Hundreds of children, hundreds of adults, poured out of the trains, each carrying a small bundle. They quickly formed lines and marched to the village square behind a military band playing a march whose tune the wind carried up to the mountains. In the square an SS officer, standing in his automobile, made a short speech. Then the évacués were divided into little groups and were soon on the way to their assigned quarters. The whole operation, executed with military precision, was over in no time.

Both women waited in suspense while the little army truck came up the road, this time with a Red Cross nurse sitting beside the chauffeur. When the vehicle stopped before the house a woman jumped out from under the tarpaulin cover at the back. She was a small, plump person, wearing a soldier's overcoat that hugged her too tightly. She had bound a piece of material around her head and

knotted it under her chin. It framed a round face that, without any special characteristics, was still not a commonplace face. Something in it warned Aunt Minna and Leni to be on guard.

The movements of the woman were brisk and decisive. She would not allow the nurse to help her children—a boy and two girls—out of the truck. The boy, about eight years old, wore black trousers that were too long for him, a khaki windbreaker, and no hat or cap. In a pale, intense face he had big black eyes that seemed to look nowhere. It was hard to believe that he was the woman's child. The little girls, on the other hand, were unmistakably hers. Dressed alike in navy blue, pleated skirts, sailors' jackets and caps, they were plump little things—blonde, blue-eyed, and inquisitive.

As soon as the children were on their feet they lined up in military fashion, side by side, standing at attention after they had put their bundles on the ground behind them. Their mother dragged a big bundle out of the car, and carefully brought out a neatly wrapped flat package that might have contained a photograph. She pressed it to her heart as if it were her most precious possession.

The Red Cross nurse introduced the women to each other and told the children's names. Then she added that she hoped they would become well acquainted and live together in harmony. When the nurse had finished her little speech the evacuated woman and children raised their right hands, as if at a command audible only to themselves, and shouted, "*Heil Hitler!*" Then the woman stepped forward and said to the nurse: "Orders are orders, but if it could be arranged, I should prefer quarters in the village."

"I'll see what can be done," answered the nurse.

"And may we go in now?" the woman went on.

"Come right in," replied Aunt Minna.

She led them into the house and to their room, the nurse and Leni following. The woman gave the room a thorough examination, then she turned to the nurse: "We'll need some covers for sleeping," she said.

"I'll help you out with blankets," said Aunt Minna.

"Blankets? You still have blankets?" the woman asked. It was a question of surprise, yet it sounded more like a reprimand.

"Yes, fortunately," answered Aunt Minna quietly. The nurse quickly took her arm and led her out of the room. Whereupon the woman immediately shut the door in the face of Leni, who had wanted to tell her that she would be glad to help in any way.

The nurse took them out of the house and behind the truck. Opening a folder and glancing over some notes, she explained: "You will have to be patient. The woman resents everybody who has not been bombed. She has lost her husband, an older child, and her parents. She's from Berlin. She has lost her home and all her possessions. She lives only on hate and considers herself a front-line soldier of the Reich. As soon as we can relieve you of her, we shall do so."

"I don't want to be relieved of her," Aunt Minna answered. "She deserves every consideration and she will get it from us."

"I'm glad you feel that way." The nurse seemed surprised. She shook hands heartily before driving away.

When Leni and her aunt came back into the house the door of the living room opened. "We have no need of paintings," the woman said and handed them the two still-lives which they had thought the children might like. In their place she had hung a photograph of the Fuehrer.

Aunt Minna took the pictures without a word and carried them into the bedroom. When she came into the kitchen, Leni was leaning with her head against the wall between the door and the stove, crying bitterly.

Aunt Minna stroked her hair. And after a while she said quietly: "There are other people too, Leni; many, many more."

Leni turned. "The children . . . did you see the boy?" she asked.

The sound of approaching steps made her close her lips and quickly dry her tears. The kitchen door flew open and the mother of the children stood in the frame.

"Have you a radio?" she asked.

"No, we haven't," Aunt Minna answered slowly.

An expression of contempt appeared on the face of the woman. Then she said: "In a minute Party Comrade Goebbels will speak over the radio. You may listen in my room." The invitation sounded like an order, as her previous question about the blankets had sounded like a reprimand. She always seemed to mean something more than what she actually said.

Leni stiffened but her aunt put a calming hand on her arm. "Come, we have to listen," she said softly.

They followed the little plump woman and stopped at the open door of the living room. On the table, which she had moved close to her picture of the Fuehrer, stood a radio. She must have brought it in the big bundle that lay half unpacked on one of the cots. The children sat on the bed, side by side. The two girls kept their eyes open with an effort, as if afraid of falling asleep. The boy, pale and motionless, gave the impression of being asleep with his eyes open. In his absolute quietness he was frightening to look at.

The woman turned on the radio. A news broadcast announced that the meat ration had been cut from 121½ ounces a week per person to a little more than 81½ ounces; the Fuehrer had ordered the courts to disregard the rules of judicial procedure; no more time was to be wasted on criminals; then followed the names of three persons, two men and a girl, who had been condemned to death for

listening to foreign broadcasts and spreading the enemy's lies; the death sentences had been carried out this morning by beheading. . . .

The little woman became aware of Leni watching the boy on the bed with pitying eyes and grew angry. "He could not take the bombardments," she said, as if ashamed of him.

"He must be bomb-shocked," Leni said, and started to cross over to him, but the woman stepped into her way. "It's none of your business," she flared. It looked as if she would throw herself at Leni. But suddenly her Spartan bearing vanished and she began to tremble. For a moment she managed to hold herself upright, then she collapsed, falling over the table. Shaken by an inner convulsion, she broke into hysterical sobbing.

At that moment Party Comrade Goebbels began to speak. Aunt Minna would have liked to shut off the radio, but she let it blare on.

Meanwhile the boy remained silent and motionless, as if unaware of anything. His two sleepy little sisters suddenly opened their eyes wide. They shrieked and huddled together, frightened by the strange behavior of their mother, who went on sobbing. The radio blared: "The German nation's hour of destiny. . . ."

The impulse to calm the girls made Leni step forward, but her aunt held her back. For some moments the room was filled with the desolate sounds of fear and despair, accompanied in discord by the vulgar, haranguing voice of the radio.

Then something unexpected happened. This immovable boy, who seemed completely unaware of what was going on around him, started to move. He rose from the iron bed, reached over to the table, and shut off the radio. There was not the slightest indication of what had made him do it. His forlorn expression had not changed in the least. But now that the abrupt silence of the radio seemed to amplify

his mother's wailing, he looked at her. It was as if his large, vacant eyes suddenly began to see—as if he had come alive again.

His little sisters, watching him, stopped crying. Then it was very still, for the woman too had fallen silent. She slowly lifted a face wet with tears and looked at her son. A moment of increasing tension passed till the light of recognition came into the boy's eyes.

The woman took his hand hesitatingly. "Speak, Thomas, speak," she said softly. The boy began to move his lips. He opened and closed them, forming words slowly, laboriously. But no sound, not the faintest, came from them. No sound at all.

"Try, Thomas. Speak," the woman urged gently. He tried again, painfully and continually. The girls left the bed and tiptoed nearer in breathless expectation.

The boy moved his lips with difficulty, and as if afraid. He opened his mouth wide, closed it, started anew. He pressed his hands against his chest. The pale face reddened, and sweat broke out all over it. But all the labor produced not a word, not a sound. In a flurry of panic he grabbed his throat with both hands and started choking himself, as if that would help. Then once more, breathing heavily, he moved his lips very carefully. But it was of no avail.

His mother followed his efforts with alternating hope and despair. The more obvious his failure became, the more her face hardened. It was frightening to see how the warm, human expression that had softened it gradually disappeared. But still more frightening was the boy's perception of this change in his mother. As she lost hope, his efforts failed in the same proportion. Finally he stood once more utterly motionless and deathly quiet. And again the woman looked at him as if she were ashamed of him.

Aunt Minna touched Leni's arm, and they retreated from the door, closing it silently. They went into the kitchen. "What can we do?" whispered Leni.

"I'll talk to the nurse," Aunt Minna answered. She opened a drawer of the corner chest, a second and a third one, till she found what she was looking for. It was a little padlock. "We are not alone any more," she said and went out by the back door.

Through the window Leni watched her replace the bolt on the woodshed door with the padlock. Coming back into the kitchen, she handed Leni the key. "If you need wood, take it from the biggest pile," she said. "In the afternoon, I will send August for some tools that have to be sharpened. He will ask for the key, and you may give it to him. He will also clean the shed."

Cleaning a woodshed sounded foolish. But Leni understood. With strangers in the house, the secret receiving set had to be taken away. The place was no longer safe. It had to be cleaned. That was the rule.

Aunt Minna had just left for the estate when the woman came out of her quarters wearing her tightly fitting soldier's coat. Her movements were again brisk and decisive, her manner aggressive. "I despise myself for losing my nerve; it will not happen again," she snapped. And she added, still more sharply: "In no case do I need your pity." She left the house without another word and marched energetically down the road to the village.

# VI

ON THE slopes of the clearing above the house the ocher-colored grass was drying and spreading itself out like feathers on a bird's belly. The wet forests sparkled with accumulated raindrops. The windows, walls, and roofs of the village below shone brightly from the washing they had received from heaven. Little white puffs of smoke burst from every chimney, adding a touch of gaiety to the landscape. No one could have guessed the inarticulate passions, the grief, misery, and suspicion that had been concentrated within one morning on this peaceful-looking bit of earth.

The war . . . the curse of the war. . . . In comparison, everything else was small and unimportant, Leni thought as she looked down the road in the afternoon. She thought of a hundred reasons for Hans's failure to come—and believed none of them. Nothing could have stopped the kind of man he was if he had really wanted to see her. There was only one reason that had made him stay away: he did not care for her any more.

When she last saw him, he had repeated the childhood gesture of pressing both hands to his head, as if something were wrong. If he would only come! If they could only find out what was wrong with them all! Then they could rest for a day. Then they could sleep side by side: one heartbeat, one breath, one dream of the future.

Leni was startled out of her thoughts by the sound of wagon wheels coming down from the mountain ridge. As she turned she saw a huge cart—a house-like box on two wheels—rattling down the rough, stony road with increasing speed. A man and a boy, hanging to a bar across the shaft, pressed their feet down on the road in an attempt to



brake the odd-looking vehicle. From some distance behind, a woman and a girl shouted warning.

Leni rose to her feet. The speed of the cart, which she judged to be heavily laden, became faster and faster. The man and boy seemed in danger, because they could not let go and jump aside, for fear of being run over. They tried to turn the cart off the road; for a moment Leni thought they would crash into the house. But the man managed with great effort to yank the shaft the other way, and the wheels obeyed, bouncing over the furrows in the road. The cart rocked madly from side to side but did not turn over, and finally came to a standstill a few yards away, in the pasture. The two at last let go of the shaft, caught their breath, and wiped the sweat from their faces. The man crawled under the cart and announced: "The brake-screw is broken."

The boy's attention had been turned to the woman and girl. The former was leaning against the crumbled stone wall, while the girl was shouting: "Mother can't go on!"

The boy ran up the road. When the man came out from under the vehicle, he could see the two children helping the woman make her way slowly down, and he went up to meet them.

He was a tall man of athletic build, limping slightly on one foot. The leatherish tint of his strong, lean face contrasted sharply with his gray hair. He put an arm around the woman and gently led her to the cart, while the children followed. Leni heard the man say: "We have arrived. We'll rest now."

Leni got up and crossed the road. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I can't go on," the woman answered apologetically. She was of middle age and must have once been beautiful.

The man repeated: "My wife cannot go on."

The girl stepped forward, pleasingly: "Mother cannot go on."

The boy came forward and asked: "Are we allowed to rest here?"

Leni was struck by their tone of fear. "Of course, you may stay here," she answered. "The house and the pasture belong to my aunt. If I can help you in any way, please say so."

"Thank you," the woman breathed softly. The three others placed themselves in a line, bowed simultaneously as actors do at curtain-call, and said in unison: "We are much obliged."

The boy had brought a little bench out of the cart and his mother sat down on it with every sign of exhaustion.

Only now, noticing the torn and faded posters that covered the cart, did Leni grasp that these were circus people, although they were dressed in shoddy city clothes. But with a feather here, and a colored scarf there, they had created for themselves a style of their own, which expressed itself also in their manners and graceful movements.

The girl ran back up the road with her hands cupped to her mouth, calling out: "Rest. We have arrived. Rest."

Up on the ridge, outlined against the sky, appeared the figure of a man, pushing a barrel-organ before him. He moved rapidly down the road, whistling cheerfully. He was short and squat, but his large, round head was so much too big for him that he looked top-heavy. He wore the wide, baggy trousers of a clown, a jacket and a Tyrolean hat that was too small for him. Stopping in front of Leni, he bowed deeply, sweeping the ground with his right hand in a grand gesture. Then he sat down beside the woman.

"This is the lot of us," said the tall man. "Five altogether; and we shall make no noise."

"I'm not worrying," Leni laughed.

At this moment the boy bowed before her with a bucket in his hand and asked: "Where can I find water?"

"Behind the house is the well."

The boy bowed and said: "We are much obliged."

Leni looked after him in amazement. "He is so polite and so orderly," she said.

"Courtesy and a sense of order an artist must learn right from childhood," the man replied.

Leni looked up, and their eyes met. His were deep blue and clear, like a mountain brook. They looked through and through her as did her aunt's sometimes. His whole bearing reminded Leni of her aunt: the same quiet assurance, the same earnestness.

"I didn't know that we still have traveling circuses," Leni said. "It's wonderful."

"*Panem et circenses*," the clown said without looking up.

"What does that mean?" Leni asked innocently.

"It's Latin. Bread and circuses," the clown explained.

"With bread and circuses the Roman tyrants kept the people from revolting," the tall man completed the explanation. It was followed by a pause. Everyone looked off in a different direction. Then the tall man said: "This is a beautiful piece of land."

"The most beautiful there is," Leni added quickly. "Our house is the highest on the road."

The boy came back with a bucketful of water. "Is it permitted to make a fire?" he asked Leni.

"The stove in the kitchen is burning," she answered. "You are welcome there."

"We are much obliged," the tall man answered for the boy. "But it is our rule never to burden anybody if we can help it. We will extinguish the fire properly, and leave no disorder behind."

"I am sure of it," Leni replied.

"And is it permitted to make a fire?" the boy insisted.

"It is permitted," Leni answered, adopting his tone and manner.

"We are obliged."

"You are welcome." Leni made a little curtsy, as the boy bowed, and they both smiled.

The tall man gazed down onto the village, examining it closely. Leni involuntarily looked down too. The road was empty.

"I see the évacués have arrived," the man said. "We are in time."

Leni heard the house door slam, and turned. The two little évacuée girls had come out. They looked around timidly and started to cry.

"We have three children from Berlin and their mother quartered in our house," she said quickly, and rushed over to the girls. A few moments later she had them in the kitchen, each drinking half a glass of milk greedily.

In the pasture a little fire began to glow under the bucket suspended from three iron poles. The boy and the girl put up a tent and helped their mother to lie down. The clown was sitting on the bench peeling potatoes and whistling. The tall man was walking down to the village, limping slightly.

The afternoon passed more quickly for Leni than had the three previous ones, when she had sat at the window like an invalid, looking out into the rain for hours. The évacué boy came into the kitchen. He drank the rest of the milk, gulping it down excitedly, then fell back into his frightening lifelessness. His sisters seemed quite accustomed to his behavior. They wanted to play "air raid" and "doctor," using him as the victim. Leni succeeded in sidetracking the idea by telling them a fairy tale, and they liked it so much that she had to repeat it. The boy turned his head as if he were listening, but nothing in his face showed whether he was actually following the story.

A knock on the kitchen door spared Leni from having to tell it a third time. It was August, the old handyman from the estate, carrying an empty sack under his arm. He explained that Leni's aunt had sent him for some tools which had to be sharpened, and asked for the key to the woodshed. Leni gave it to him; no one could have detected the

faintest trace of any secret understanding between them.

The two girls ran after August, but he shut the door of the shed in their curious little faces. When he came out again the sack was heavy, with tools sticking out. He gave back the key and left with a "*Heil Hitler*." The two girls raised their right arms like automatons and shouted, "*Heil Hitler*." Passing the circus cart, August stopped to watch the clown repairing the broken brake-screw, and he gave him some advice before going on his way. "May nothing happen to him," Leni prayed.

A little later the évacuée woman came back from the village. She too stopped beside the cart, talked to the clown, and shook her head disapprovingly. But she did not say a word about it when she came into the house. Indeed she said nothing at all. She put a box containing a few cans of food, army ration, and a loaf of bread on the kitchen table, took the children into her room and closed the door.

Leni had started to prepare dinner when the woman came to the kitchen to do some cooking. She thanked Leni curtly for giving milk to the children, adding: "But don't tell them silly stories. We have to be realists now." Before Leni could say a word she continued: "You seem to have very little to do." It was half question, half accusation.

"I'm on vacation," Leni said quietly.

"Vacation!" The woman repeated the word as if it were a crime. "We in Berlin don't know anything about vacations. We know only war."

Leni grew angry. She knew that the woman kept herself going by her contempt for others, but she had to be put in her place just the same.

"I'm a worker in an ammunition plant," she said firmly. "For months I have worked seven nights, eighty-four hours every week, with never a night off."

"For months she has worked—for months!" the woman scoffed. "You don't look to me as if you need a rest."

Leni stepped close to her. "I got a vacation because my

fiancé is home on furlough. From the Russian front. He is an old party member. You'd better be careful before you open your mouth too wide."

Only after the words were out did Leni realize what she had said. She instantly regretted dragging Hans into the quarrel. But it was too late now. She left the kitchen and ran out of the house.

Losing her head; letting herself be provoked like that! It did not really matter what the woman would think—that was not what excited her. It was something else. Leni now had to admit to herself what she had not wanted to acknowledge all afternoon: that she did not have the power to stay away from Hans. It was no use: she would have to see him and fight it all out with him. She was not tired any more. And she was no longer afraid. She walked up toward the ridge and sat down on a stone, feeling suddenly very calm.

The day was coming to an end. In but a short while the fiery ball of the sun in the cloudless sky would touch the blackness of the Devil's Wood and drown itself in it, right there where the quarry was, there where her life had begun, on that moonlit night so long ago. And staring at that distant point in the glowing landscape, Leni felt as if high above in the air that had become so evening-still, she heard the beat and swish of the wings of fate.

She walked back to the house. On the private road along the edge of the eastern woods sped a military car followed by two large limousines. They disappeared into the entrance of the estate. The cars reminded her of her aunt's remark about the estate being reserved for week-end guests. And she guessed that this must be Saturday. Since she had begun to work at the ammunition plant she never knew what day it was.

When she arrived at the house, the tall circus man stood in the middle of the road as if waiting for her. It was clear from his face that he had seen her agitation. She did not

mind; she knew now what she had to do. And so she smiled. When he saw it, he too smiled and did not say what he had intended.

At this moment the two circus children came out of the tent, dressed in rose-colored tights, the rays of the setting sun gilding their graceful bodies. And the clown stepped behind his hand-organ.

"Oh, how wonderful!" Leni exclaimed. "How beautiful to look at! Will they give a performance now?"

"They are only going to do their daily exercises," the man answered. "But with your permission I will tell them that they may perform for you, who have been so kind to us."

"The way they stand is itself a performance—so beautiful!"

The man turned and went toward the children. "Pull yourselves together," he said. "Give with all your heart. It's your great privilege to offer our good hostess the blessings of our art." He clapped his hands and counted, "One, two, three."

The children bowed, the hand-organ started a slow waltz. To its rhythms the children began to move, the boy lifting the girl high up into the air, setting her down, turning her around. It was a slow number, executed with great charm and nobility. Leni clapped her hands.

"In all my life I have never seen anything like it," she cried excitedly. "How they bend! How restrained they are! How light they make themselves! As if there were nothing heavy to drag them down. To think that we might all be like that!"

The children acknowledged her enthusiasm with bows and threw her kisses. Then they placed themselves in a new position and the organ commenced a quick polka. In a whirl that was half dance, half acrobatics, the two children flew through the air, turning wheels, doing aerial somersaults, their figures gleaming in the red light of the setting sun.

Fascinated by the spectacle, Leni did not turn when she heard the door of the house slam twice. The next moment the évacué boy was at her side. His mother came after him, furiously bent on forcing him back into the house. But she stopped abruptly and stared.

He had raised a hand, tremblingly pointing at the performing children, and moved his lips convulsively. But now a sound came from them with unexpected force, a guttural, inhuman sound, bursting with excitement. A moment later the bellowing bark became more human, forming words that tumbled over each other, and suddenly the word "acrobats" could be made out quite clearly. The boy repeated, "Acrobats, acrobats," in quick succession, more and more softly, a smile appearing on his face.

Just then the circus number came to an end. With the last note of the organ the children landed on their feet, bowed, and threw kisses. Leni, shaken by more than one emotion, was unable to move. The boy continued whispering, "Acrobats, acrobats." Then he fell silent, appearing deeply puzzled. And he said to himself, as if not believing it: "I can talk. I can talk."

He looked at Leni and repeated: "I can talk." He looked at his mother, and quite normally the words rang out: "I can talk!" He looked up as if scanning the sky for planes and shouted defiantly: "I'm not afraid." Then he ran to his mother and threw himself violently on her bosom, sobbing convulsively.

The sun had drowned in the blackness of the Devil's Wood. The color of land and sky grew into a deep blue that darkened quickly. The voices of the day fell silent; the voices of the night had not yet awakened. The call of a bugle, a melancholy signal, sounded thinly from the village, from which no lights showed. The circus people stamped out their fire. "The moon will rise in an hour," Leni heard the clown say.



She had thanked the circus children for their performance and explained to them that their part had touched the little boy so deeply that he had found his speech again. The children had bowed and said modestly, "We are much obliged."

Then old August had appeared once more, and Leni had thought for a moment that something had gone wrong. But he had only brought word not to wait with dinner for her aunt. Week-end guests had arrived—"three carloads full," he muttered contemptuously—and her aunt might come home very late that night, or not at all, depending on the duration of the party.

Leni was alone in the kitchen. She ate some of the meat soup her aunt had brought home the day before and with it a piece of bread. The évacués had supped on their army rations in their own room. For quite a while now there had been silence in their quarters. They must have gone to sleep. After washing the dishes Leni lay down on the old sofa behind the kitchen table and stared at the ceiling. She was calm now. The few days of rest had done her good. She knew herself once more and was again able to think, after having been nothing but a machine part for months. The next day she would return to Dresden. Her mind was made up.

"The moon will rise in an hour." The clown had said it in a curious manner, as if implying something else. Leni could not help reflecting about the circus people. They behaved as if they were from another world. They were so polite. The children treated the elders with respect. They had more restraint than those Nazi party folk who always talked about order and discipline. And yet they smiled at each other and moved so lightly. How beautiful and simple life could be. . . .

Leni got up to let in Nero, who was barking and scratching on the door. When she looked out, the circus cart and the little tent stood black in the blackness of the night.

Nothing moved. No sound was to be heard. Leni felt more awake than she had for a long time. To walk to the quarry when the moon is up . . . she thought, and was about to close the door when the dog shot out of the house and raced up the road, barking and howling.

Leni saw the lights of a car come slowly over the ridge, very slowly, and behind it people, more and more of them, in rows of four. She made them out as they passed through the beam of a strong searchlight moving up behind them from the other side of the ridge. The people staggered and swayed as they merged with the blackness of the slope.

Leni whistled for Nero and waited, her heart beating fast. The *évacuée* woman came out of her room and asked why the dog was barking in that awful way. She was completely dressed. The column of people moved fully into the glare of the searchlight mounted on a second car which had come over the ridge behind them. One could distinguish them quite clearly: men and women with little suitcases in their hands, or bundles on sticks which they balanced on their shoulders. The movement of the column was a stumbling, halting stagger down the stony road. It conveyed utter exhaustion and hopelessness.

"Who are they?" the woman asked.

"From the other side—Czechs," Leni answered.

"Czechs! They wanted to attack us once, they tortured the Sudeten Germans!" The woman was seized by a fanatic frenzy of hate at the word "Czechs." "Those swine!" she shouted and stepped out to the road.

Leni knew that that was not true. She had lived at the frontier all her life and knew the Czechs. They were sober, peaceful, hard-working people. The Sudeten Germans had been much better off with them than since they had been incorporated into the Third Reich. They said so themselves, now that it was too late.

It was not the first time that Leni had seen Czechs driven over the mountains like cattle. She ran into the kitchen

and returned with a pitcher of water and all the bread there was. In the meantime the circus people had come out of their cart and tent and stood at the edge of the road: the tall man, the two children, the clown. Under his jacket the boy was hiding half a loaf of bread that had been handed to him by his mother.

The first car passed the house. Three soldiers sat in it with a machine gun pointed at the column. The évacuée woman shouted, "*Heil Hitler!*" but the soldiers did not answer her. They too seemed to be tired. One could see from the dust on the car that they must have been on the move all day. One could see it still better in the appearance of the prisoners. They were of all ages, but the majority consisted of young boys and girls, many of them fair-haired, as were few of the "master race." The young supported the old, though they themselves needed support. Hunger and exhaustion spoke from the feverish eyes and hollow cheeks.

"One more kilometer to go," shouted one of the soldiers, but it made not the least impression on the column; not the slightest movement of relief went through it. They were too spent to care any more. They staggered on automatically. The évacuée woman watched them with sneering satisfaction.

Leni saw the circus boy on the other side of the road edge nearer and nearer the passing prisoners, and finally hand one of them the half loaf of bread, quickly and without being seen by the guards. She too knew how strictly forbidden it was to make any contact with prisoners or foreign workers, but she hoped the guards would be humane enough to look the other way. And even if they were not . . . She stepped forward and handed the pitcher of water to a young girl, who gave her a glance that she would never in all her life forget. And, thank God, the guards either did not see it or did not care.

But Leni had underestimated the hatred and confusion that animated and ruled the évacuée woman. When she

saw what Leni did, she stared for a moment as if petrified. Then, with a shrill howl, she ran after the Czech girl and smashed the pitcher out of her hands. It crashed to pieces on a stone, the breaking glass making a sound like tinkling bells.

"You bitch!" shouted one of the soldiers from the second car. Another beside him gave him a punch in the ribs and told him to shut up if he did not want to get all of them into trouble. Leni heard them starting an argument. She could not move, so terrified was she by the woman's action. Her mind a blank, she stared at the last two people in the column, a young boy and a girl of about seventeen. They walked hand in hand like two children, no less weary than the other prisoners, but as they stumbled on they managed to look at each other as people do who are in love, and they smiled.

After they had passed, Leni turned to the évacuée woman. And looking at her she found herself unable to do anything or say a word. She merely walked back to the house and there leaned her head against the wall.

The woman came after her. "I shall report you to the Gestapo," she snapped. "I shall report you for giving aid and comfort to the enemy."

"You do—and I'll break your neck," sounded a masculine voice. Leni whirled around and could only gasp.

Hans stood in front of her, with a wild face. The next thing she was aware of was his breath, heavy with liquor, as he embraced her and pressed her close.

He placed a half-empty bottle of schnapps on Aunt Minna's kitchen table, which he pushed aside, threw the pistol belt and coat over a chair, and sat down on the sofa.

Standing at the door Leni watched him, watched his every move. He was unshaven and sweating. Either he had drunk too much, or he must have hurried up the road.

Hans brought out a piece of soap, wrapped in yellow

paper with violets on it—the present he had bought for his mother, but he had not been home in the meanwhile. Shoving it across the table in Leni's direction, he explained: "It's for you."

She could not say a word. Shaken still by his violent embrace outside and by the suddenness of his appearance, she felt as if every drop of blood had left her body. Now it rushed back to her head and hammered at her temples.

There was much in his eyes that she understood: the quick appraisal of her looks; the desire to know what she was thinking; the irritation at her silence. But these were only the obvious things. Deeper in his eyes was an expression of stern sincerity. "I have come after all," he said.

She took off her jacket and hung it on the hook on the door; she crossed to the stove and put a new log into the dying fire. She smoothed back her hair. She thought of the fact that her aunt would be home late that night, or not at all. But she was calm now. Of one thing she was sure: he needed her, or he would not have come.

She moved the table back to its proper place and sat down at it, opposite Hans. When she looked at the schnapps bottle, he pushed it out of reach as if he wanted to please her. Then the silence between them grew, each waiting for the other to say the first word.

"You look fine, more as I've always remembered you," he ventured at last. "The rest does you good; I'm glad."

"I suppose I have you to thank for it," she answered.

"I told Meissner that you were no good to me, working all night. You see, I really did it for myself."

"I waited for you——"

"I couldn't come that afternoon—Meissner took me along to a meeting in Berlin. The next day, when I came to the barracks, I was pretty mad because I didn't find you. I thought you had run out on me."

There was a pause. He wearily moved a hand across his

forehead as if he wanted to brush away much of what was on his mind. The back of the hand was scratched, two parallel scratches such as a woman's sharp nails would make. Leni took them in with a quick glance.

"Yes, I tried to forget you," he said. "But I can't."

"And I should have gone back to town tomorrow," she said.

"Because you wanted to see me?" he asked.

"Yes."

There was another pause. Leni picked up the piece of soap that lay between them on the table and smelt it. "Thank you," she said and, after a moment, added absent-mindedly: "Violets." But looking at Hans, she repeated: "Violets—we gathered violets on that day on the other side of the range," and a faint smile played over her face.

He reached out and with tender fingers felt his way over her face as if to steal the smile from it and hold it. But all his fingers found there were the tears that sprang from her eyes.

She rose quickly and turned away, embarrassed and angry with herself.

He looked at the teardrops on his hand. And while he thought, I don't want her to cry, he saw this hand, in which there was now a feeling of her cheeks and of tenderness, shooting a comrade and stealing his furlough paper because he wanted to be with this girl—and she ought not now to be crying.

In an attempt to make her smile again, he said: "It was a beautiful day, the last peaceful day, when we met over there. I always remembered it when things were at their worst; I dreamt of it. We found so many violets. And I carried you over the brook. You wore a white dress. You had blue ribbons in your braids, blue ribbons like butterflies. Do you remember?"

Yes, she did. She too had dreamt of that day, a thousand

times. But now his questions reminded her of the Czechs stumbling down the road, and the évacuée woman smashing the pitcher out of the girl's hand.

"Yes, I remember that day," she answered. She dried her tears and turned back to the table. "The Czechs were holding an automobile race; they were so happy with their fast little cars. Everybody was gay. There was no enmity between them and us—now we drive them like cattle over the mountains."

She saw his hand that lay on the table clench into a fist, and relax again. Without looking up he said, spacing his words heavily and slowly: "It's the war. Sit down. Forget it."

"Forget the war! Who can do that, Hans?"

"You *must*, Leni," he replied. "For heaven's sake, forget it. Don't remind me of it. I have only a few days. Let's forget the war and everything but ourselves. Let me live for a few days, Leni."

He had spoken with great weariness. And as he looked up now to her, pleadingly, he had an expression on his face which she had never seen on it before. It was quiet and hard, it was an expression beyond common pain and suffering—it looked like the face of the soldier on the little war monument down in the village. And Leni felt there were many things she did not know; she felt very small of a sudden, and her own pains and sorrows seemed of less importance.

She sat down beside him and took his hands in hers. For a long while they did not speak, simply holding hands, as in her dreams. Now to her too came the thought: To forget the war. For a few days—to forget everything but ourselves.

"Why did you hide your hand at the barracks when I turned from the window?" he asked abruptly, looking at it now and seeing again nothing but the callouses.

"It brings bad luck to look at hands," she said, blush-

ing, and tried to withdraw the hand, but he did not let go.

After a minute's pause she suddenly bent the thumb and showed him the faint scars of the cross between the joints, and told him the story of the childhood night when she had watched him in the quarry and had secretly made herself his follower.

"That's what you meant when you said that day on the other side that you had loved me ever since you were a child—it is true, it is really true." He murmured it wonderingly, looking at her as if he did not dare believe her. But then he bent forward, kissed her hand, and buried his face in it. "You don't know what this means to me, you can't know!"

As he lifted his head and turned hesitatingly toward her, it was she now who drew him to her, and kissed him.

In the next moment the silence of the night was broken by the sudden roar of a car coming up from the village. It stopped below the house, brakes squeaking; almost simultaneously a machine gun began firing a few rounds from it.

Hans took no notice of the shooting. He kissed Leni again, stroked her hair and did not want to release her when she rose.

"Don't pay any attention to that," he begged. "Don't listen. It's the war. Forget everything but ourselves."

The shooting started anew; again a few rounds, then silence. There were voices shouting, silence again. The car roared on past the house, stopping again higher up the road.

Leni rushed, trembling, to the middle of the kitchen, torn between the urge to run outside and the desire to stay beside Hans and to shut out everything else.

"I have to see what it is! I must see!" she whispered.

Before he was on his feet to hold her back, she had seized her jacket and rushed outside.

He stared at the door as it closed; he heard the évacué



children cry and their mother scolding them. Then he settled slowly back on the sofa and reached for the bottle of schnapps.

The firing of the machine gun on the slopes above the village had been heard also on the estate. The sound had traveled unmuffled through the clear air of the night and made the position of the gun seem much nearer than it actually was.

In the kitchen Leni's aunt, who was preparing the midnight supper—her last job for the day—and old August, who was washing dishes, exchanged glances behind the back of the chef, who was a Gestapo agent.

In the hall of the main floor, where a party was in progress, the couples stopped dancing and listened. From the library door on the first floor the district SS leader, Captain Meissner, gave his adjutant a nod, and the silent lieutenant with a face as sharp as a knife left for a telephone to find out the cause of the shooting.

Only three people in the whole house appeared not to have heard the firing, or else to be ignoring it. One was the owner of the house, State Counselor von Kraus. He continued, undisturbed, the argument he was setting forth to Meissner. The other two were young Countess Beate and a cadet of the Luftwaffe, with whom she was sitting in the conservatory behind a group of palms. She wore a rose-colored evening gown cut very low. The cadet had told her, blushing from ear to ear, that she looked like a flower and that he loved her. She allowed him to kiss her hands, but had mocked his innocence and tortured him by telling him cynically that she was Meissner's mistress.

The powerful State Counselor (the title was a mere formality; his influence was based on his being one of the leading industrialists of the country) was talking to Meissner about problems of high policy. He had explained the numerous production difficulties caused by the air bom-

bardments. Now he argued a radical about-face in ideological propaganda, sustained by concrete actions, among them the promulgation of laws designed to give the impression that Nazism had entered on a new and more mature phase.

"We have to put forward a front of modern conservatism," he said. "The party has to water its wine, at least for the export trade. There are enough people everywhere in the world, powerful people, who are afraid of revolutionary changes during the course of the war. We have to give them concrete arguments for a compromise peace with us. As long as we remain in power, in whatever guise, we shall be victorious in the end. We have still a bargaining position. It will be difficult for the Western Powers to continue the war if we are ready to quit under the pretense of unconditional surrender, should they require that. If we play the game shrewdly enough we shall win a compromise and gain time."

Meissner listened carefully. He was amused by all this wishful thinking, and he decided to make a report of it to headquarters, in self-protection. On the other hand, he was sure that the State Counselor would not have dared to talk to him of peace, of a peace of unconditional surrender even, and hint at the liquidation of the Nazi party as a step to victory, without having some encouragement from above, or perhaps definite orders to make such remarks. Was he testing him? Or was the situation really so critical?

Meissner, for his part, did not care one way or another. He would either live as he pleased or die as he pleased. And if defeat was certain, he preferred, instead of maneuvering, to turn the debacle into an earthquake such as the world had never experienced. But he said out loud: "I am fortunate not to be a politician. I take orders from the Fuehrer and carry them out. And I shall always carry them out, whatever they may be. I sleep well and enjoy life."

The lieutenant came back and reported that two Czech

prisoners had escaped, but were being pursued. "Have the commanding officer of the transit camp report to me tomorrow at eight," Meissner snapped, then said good night to his host, not adding another word to their conversation.

The State Counselor was no fool. He knew that Meissner would report what he had said. But he, too, would write a report. He detested that card-sharp and upstart.

Meissner went directly to his rooms and sent the adjutant for the countess. She rose from behind the palms as soon as she saw the lieutenant appear at the conservatory entrance and left the cadet without even giving him a glance.

Aunt Minna walking home that night met Leni halfway between the eastern forest and the house. The girl told her that two prisoners had escaped. The patrol car that had shot at them and pursued them to the other side of the range had returned without them. Leni knew also who the fugitives were: the Czech boy and girl who had walked so dreamily at the end of the column. Leni had this information from the tall circus man, who had unexpectedly appeared on the road. He had heard it in the village, where he had gone once more on business, so he said. And she had asked no further questions.

"He who does not ask is not led astray," remarked Aunt Minna, who knew through old August, Leni was certain, of the arrival of the circus, although she had the feeling that her aunt knew much more.

As they approached the house Leni said: "Hans has come back."

"Now the whole house is full of Nazis," her aunt answered after a pause.

"I don't know," Leni said hesitatingly. "It doesn't seem to be the same Hans."

"Once a Nazi, always a Nazi," Aunt Minna said.

When they came into the kitchen Hans was fast asleep on the sofa; the schnapps bottle was empty. Leni took his coat from the chair and covered him, while Aunt Minna watched her silently.

## VII

EVER since the church bells had been confiscated in the second year of the war, the village priest went every Sunday morning into the bell tower to pray. Rain or shine, he went at the same early hour at which the bells once had tolled to waken sleepers and tell them that Mass was not far off. He knelt down and prayed between the ropes that hung uselessly from the belfry where swarms of sparrows had made their nest.

As long as there were people in the village he had prayed that they might prepare for church, though there were no bells to call them. He had changed the prayer when he became a shepherd without a flock. That had happened shortly after the defeat of Stalingrad, when the villagers were taken from their houses. From then on he prayed that they might not forget, wherever they were and whatever they did, that it was Sunday, the day of the Lord.

The priest was an old man, nothing but skin and bones. His black soutane had become much too loose during the last few years; he always had trouble with its folds as he knelt down in the dust that rose like a cloud when he entered the tower. There was no one left to keep the place clean, and he himself was too weak for physical work.

He had two prayers to say this Sunday: one for his old flock that was away, and one for the new, the évacués from Berlin who had been quartered in the village the day before. They were mostly children, and he had no hope that they would be allowed to go to church. He did not even know whether there were any among them, after all these heathen years, whose parents had dared to tell them that the prophet of the mutilated cross—the swastika—was a false prophet. So he prayed that the spirit of his sermon

and of the Holy Mass which he was about to celebrate might penetrate the walls of the church and go to them and echo in their little hearts.

And after these two prayers the old priest, feeling that he would not live much longer, said one in his own behalf. A few of the older people who had come with the children had greeted him on their arrival with wistful glances, or even with the whispered words, "Glory to Jesus Christ." Now he prayed that these might find their way to church. If not all of them, at least one.

"At least one." The priest raised his head and looked up through the darkness of the tower to the empty belfry high above where the first rays of the sun shone in and made a golden light. "At least one," he repeated with trembling lips. And he who had been so long alone with his own voice in the empty church, like the preacher in the desert, prayed to the Almighty to grant his last wish and allow him to preach the word once more to someone, someone whom he could see.

The priest had lain awake all night thinking about the Word. He had asked himself again and again: What was the true Word? What was he to say, should someone come to listen to him? What hope and comfort could he give? They all were victims of a war which they themselves had begun. Too few of them had opposed it. They had cheered too long, as the false prophet had marched from victory to victory. And what was he to say to them, he who himself had not hindered the war, he who himself had prayed for victory? What had he preached when the false prophet began to spread his scourge and people came to him for the Word? He had told them to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's, and to God the things that were God's. But in that way he had only made them obey the false prophet. What was he to say now?

When the priest returned from the bell tower to his little house behind the church, where he had lived since he

had taken over the parish as a young man, he found a visitor in his study. Hans was seated in a chair beside the huge desk, in the same chair where in the years before the advent of the false prophet the priest used to place any boy whom he had called to his house for a serious word "just between ourselves." Hans had often sat there, and it was an odd feeling for him to sit there now.

As the priest entered, Hans got up and said: "Good morning."

The priest did not recognize his voice. He stepped up to him and looked closely at his face with straining eyes. After a moment of uncertainty he said: "Hans, it's you." He paused, thinking of the prodigal son, and added: "You have come after all."

"Did you expect me?" Hans asked haltingly.

"Not here in my house," the priest answered slowly. "But Leni was waiting for you."

The priest sat down behind a desk covered with the paraphernalia of the ardent stamp collector. There were magnifying glasses, many little bottles filled with colored liquids, scissors, and pincers. On one side of the desk, between book ends in the form of lions, stood the volumes of the priest's stamp collection, catalogues, and books of philatelic literature. While the priest looked at Hans, his fingers went over these things eagerly, touching this and that as if afraid of not finding them. These movements were so expressive that the pale, trembling hands seemed like two animals. When the priest noticed that Hans watched the hands, their movements stopped and they suddenly lay among all these things as if dead.

"Speak, my son," the priest went on. "What is on your mind?"

Hans hesitated. Then he said as casually as he could: "What papers do you ask of people who want to be married?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether I know them or not."

"If Leni and I wanted to be married?"

"You are on furlough?"

"Yes."

"When do you have to go back?"

"In a week."

There was a pause—as if both had talked first and were thinking afterwards.

Hans thought of the dead comrade's furlough paper on which he was traveling; if only he would not have to show it! He thought of Leni—what her expression would be when he proposed to her. She would not refuse him. She was in love with him. She had said so. Everything else was mere talk. It would mean nothing as soon as he spoke seriously to her. They would have a week, an entire week of forgetting . . . the war and everything.

The priest thought of what Leni could be to Hans. He had been a dreamy child, then a restless boy, suddenly without pity, ambitious and impatient. There had been other boys of poorer stock, less gifted, less honest, who had become decent folk. Less promising boys. Hans had always given his father trouble, but he had also been his great hope till he was taken in by the teachings of the false prophet, by the doctrines of the Antichrist. Leni was simple and human, humble before the mysteries and miracles of life. Her example might bring Hans back to the path of God if she had time . . . but only one week . . . and if Hans should never return . . .

The priest looked up. "I know you both, I have baptized you both. I don't need any papers from you."

"Then you could marry us right away?"

"In your case I think I could dispense with certain formalities."

"Could you marry us today?"

"Yes, Hans."



It was queer. This yes came almost as an anti-climax to Hans. To think a thing impossible and then get it so without effort! So simple—to marry without papers! That he had not thought of the old priest before!

"Thanks, Father, thanks a thousand times. You don't know what it means to me."

"You might come with Leni to Mass," the priest said excitedly, "and afterwards——" He did not finish. People had to come of their own accord to Mass. It was not Christian to lure them and take advantage of them.

"We'll come as soon as we are ready." Hans got up. He was about to thank the priest once more but instead he said, running a hand over his chin: "I should like to ask you another favor. I should like to shave for the wedding. But there are no barbers any more and——"

The priest interrupted him. "You are welcome, my son. In the bedroom you will find what you need. Even a bit of soap. And on the kitchen stove there is warm water."

"Good!" Hans got up and disappeared into the bedroom that was next to the study and whence a door opened into a corridor that led to the kitchen. Hans remembered it well. His father and the priest had been friends all their lives, and as a boy he had often been in the house.

The priest listened to Hans fetching the warm water from the kitchen. His pale hands had become alive again, one picking up a stamp, the other a magnifying glass. But in his mind the old man was occupied as he had always been since the arrival of the évacués the day before—with his longing not to be alone in the church, not to preach to empty pews and be frightened by his own hollow voice echoing through the nave.

It was very still in the house. Hans was shaving with the priest's razor. He had stopped whistling. The priest worked at his stamps, praying silently. The sun began to fill the rooms whose old furniture had remained in place for over a hundred years. In the corner near the door leaned the

musket which a French soldier had left behind after the armies of the Holy Alliance had beaten Napoleon in the great battle of Leipzig. When the priest's eyes tired from looking at the stamps, he rested them on the musket. In his nearsightedness he barely made out the weapon. But he knew that it stood there in the corner. And it had become a symbol of consolation to him—no tyranny ever survived.

Through the windows came the sound of steps approaching hurriedly, and a moment later someone knocked rapidly on the door of the house.

The priest went to open the door. Outside stood a little woman, white-haired, dressed in an ill-fitting black jacket with seams turning gray, a greenish skirt that seemed too long, and a queer little hat and a veil that came down over her face. She carried a pompadour reticule and fingered it nervously.

"I'm Mrs. Helfrich," she said breathlessly, "Mrs. Helfrich from Berlin. May I talk to you, Father?" She threw a furtive glance toward the village square, as if fearful of being seen entering the priest's house.

The priest led her into the study and waved her to the chair where Hans had sat before. He too sat down, his hands reaching involuntarily for the stamps, then checking themselves. Mrs. Helfrich lifted her veil and he recognized her as one of the women who had whispered to him the day before: "Glory to Jesus Christ." He waited until she had caught her breath.

"I shan't be able to come to Mass," she said. "We have been ordered to assemble in the square in an hour. They will keep us there till Mass is over. They do it on purpose." Her voice trembled excitedly and little red spots appeared in her pale, tired face.

The priest tried to calm her. "It is no sin if you miss Mass for good reasons," he said. "Come next Sunday, or perhaps sooner. In the meantime, pray in your heart."

"No, they will never let us go to Mass," the woman an-

swered. "Every day at Mass time they will keep us busy under a pretext. They do it on purpose."

Of course, they did. The priest knew. "You must pray in your heart," he repeated guardedly. Though he felt no mistrust toward the woman, being on guard had become second nature since the rule of the false prophet.

The woman bent forward and continued hastily: "I lost a son in Africa and one in Russia. I lost my husband when the railway station was bombed. He was an official there. I lost my married daughter. She and her whole family, children and husband, all of them perished. I have nothing on this earth any more. My husband had always said they would bring misfortune on Germany, but so many were afraid. I am not afraid any more."

Her voice was rising and the priest quickly laid a finger to his lips. He pointed to the bedroom door that was not entirely closed.

The woman continued in a whisper: "I come in the name of friends. We want to do something against them. We want you to advise us. We could meet after dark in the church. Nobody will know."

"It is not allowed to hold any service or assemble in church at any other time than between eight and ten in the morning," the priest answered slowly, reciting an order of the SS. "With the exception of these two hours churches must be closed."

The woman seized his hand. "But we won't tell anybody. You can trust us, Father. We are ready to do something against them. You must help us, Father."

"How many are you?" the priest asked after a pause.

"Three, only three. There are many who think as we do but we aren't quite sure who they are. Most of them don't dare show what is going on inside. They are afraid they might be separated from their children."

"I cannot open the church," the priest went on. "But if

you want to come here, to visit me in a social way, I shall be very glad. But come openly and not after dark."

"We'll be here," the woman answered and bent forward to kiss the priest's hand. As she saw the stamps on the desk, her eyes filled with tears. "My husband was a collector too," she said, turning away quickly.

When the woman had left Hans came out of the bedroom, spick and span. His uniform needed pressing but he had brushed it thoroughly; also his boots. "How do I look?" he asked laughingly.

"Fine, Hans, fine!" The priest peered at him, but his mind was with Mrs. Helfrich.

"Thanks for everything. We'll be here after Mass. Good-by, Father." In the door Hans turned and added: "Don't let yourself get mixed up with the woman who was here. I heard what she said. They all cheered and threw flowers at us as long as everything went well. With the first rainy day they squirm. We don't care. But if they try to do anything against us, we'll stamp them out. *Heil Hitler!*"

After Hans had slammed the door, the priest stared for a long while in the direction of the musket that had been in the battle of Leipzig. Then he got up from the desk, feeling very weak. Slowly he went over to his prie-dieu and knelt down to pray for Leni, for Mrs. Helfrich, and for Hans.

In the square the évacués were assembling. They came marching in fours from every part of the village—children of all ages, women, old men. At the foot of the flagpole, on which the swastika fluttered noisily in a fresh breeze, a little platform was being put up. In the far corner of the square stood the circus cart which Hans had seen in the pasture the evening before and had noticed was missing in the morning. A hand-organ was playing and had attracted a crowd of children. Hans was startled and puzzled at see-

ing that they were all barefooted, until he remembered the grumbling truckdriver who had picked him up on the way out of Dresden the day before. The man had told him among other things of the new regulation that made it compulsory for every child living in the country to go barefooted and that forbade women and girls to wear stockings. Now Hans caught himself repeating in his mind what the driver had said again and again, like a refrain: "We have come a long way."

Hans dismissed his involuntary criticism and, as he had done before when coming down to the village, looked in the direction of his father's house, where he had been born and had grown up and lived until he had left it as a rebellious youth. Now he would have liked to go inside. But an SS sentry stood at the door, and above it hung a white board with the black inscription: *SS Kommandantur*. The sight made Hans conscious of how conspicuous he must be at the present moment, standing alone on the hill. With the false furlough paper in his pocket he had certainly no desire to attract attention. So he started and turned into a small back road behind the houses and gardens, leading out of the village. As he quickened his pace he realized that the melody of the hand-organ was suddenly absent, and that the wind carried instead shouts of command and trumpet signals.

It was a beautiful day—clear, crisp; the hard mountain air was full of challenge. He had known days like that in his youth, when he had wanted to embrace the whole world. He would storm up into the mountains and gaze for hours at the wide distant circle of the horizon. And he would spit down on the dusty village, where people went about their business, without eyes and ears, busy swindling each other and making petty profits. And he remembered telling his father for the first time after such a day—during one of those "being-late-for-dinner-scenes"—that everything in the world needed to be changed.

Now, back home after so many things had been changed, and after he had been through so much, he felt neither regret nor nostalgia. Though only a few things had turned out according to the great dream, he still believed in the principles that had led him forward: never to be afraid; better one great moment than a long, dreary life; ever to rise above oneself and have the strength to perish rather than compromise. And as he walked on up the road he grew surer of himself again with every step, feeling that Leni, in spite of everything that was difficult for her, would embrace these concepts as did he himself, and that they would cherish the dream together.

Below the ravine Hans met the évacués who had been quartered in Leni's aunt's house and who were on their way down to the village. Behind the two little girls and the solemn boy walked their mother, looking like a self-important sergeant in her soldier's coat. Hans stepped over to her side. "You mustn't mind my threatening you last night," he said, "and don't think about my girl. She'll be all right; I'm going to marry her today."

These words had an unexpected effect on the woman. She could not take her eyes from Hans, and they grew moist as she said: "All last night I dreamt of my wedding day. It was the most beautiful day in my life." And for a moment the woman smiled, her face relaxed and young again. But it was only for a moment; her features froze up, and glaring hatefully at Hans, she raised her arm, shouted, "*Heil Hitler!*" and hurried on to catch up with the children.

Leni had awakened this morning just as Hans left the house. From behind a window curtain she had watched him walking down to the village and had listened to his whistling the old tune, which sings about the red dawn that lights the way for the soldier's early death—

*Morgenrot, Morgenrot,  
Leuchtest mir zum fruehen Tod. . . .*

She had not known what to think. Rushing into the kitchen to see whether he had left any message for her she found nothing but his pistol belt hung on the hook. She sat down, her knees shaking—so afraid she had been all of a sudden that she would never see him again.

At breakfast something peculiar and moving happened. Aunt Minna, who seldom talked of personal things, said abruptly to Leni: "You love him—and you cannot help yourself."

"Yes, I do love him. And I cannot help myself," Leni replied.

"I heard you last night," Aunt Minna went on. "You could not sleep and I knew how you felt."

Leni put her coffee cup down and looked at her aunt in surprise. She loved her and had always believed in the kind heart her aunt was hiding, but never before had she heard her speak with such warmth.

"Listen, Leni," Aunt Minna continued. "Once I was as much in love, and as stupidly, as you are now. He was fine when he was nice, but a brute when he wanted something and could not get it easily. That's why I finally broke with him. That's why I married a kind, sweet man. But I soon learned that I had done the wrong thing, and I always regretted it. I couldn't stop wondering—and sometimes I still do—if perhaps I couldn't have changed the other one. I shall, of course, never know for sure. But this much I learned: It is better to burn oneself than never know fire. If you cannot help yourself, live your love for better or worse. There is no escape from our hearts."

And after she had thus spoken to Leni, Aunt Minna had left for the estate, as she did every morning, and without another word.

Leni was on the lookout for Hans as soon as her aunt had gone. She had a short glimpse of him on the church hill, and wondered what he was doing there, her heart beating fast, though she had forbidden herself to think

what she had been thinking. Then she saw him talk to the *évacuée* woman.

Now she caught sight of him as he came up from the ravine and quickly nearer—he was washed and shaved and brushed from head to foot. It gave him a boyish appearance, like that of a boy on Sunday. And it was Sunday, she remembered, and this gave her a festive feeling.

"I'm sorry I fell asleep last night," he called as he approached. Only when he stopped in front of her did he say: "Good morning." And then he took her into his arms and kissed her.

"First I thought you were gone again," she murmured softly. "But I saw your pistol belt and knew you would be back."

"I had to have a shave," he explained. "Don't you notice it?" And he kissed her once more.

"Have you had your breakfast too?"

"No. Nothing at all."

"Then come in."

He watched her moving about. She wore the same blouse and skirt as in the barracks, but as she put on a white apron the factory girl disappeared and she was again the Leni he had always thought of in Russia.

She set the table with great care, getting white linen from the chest and taking her aunt's old porcelain from the cupboard. For him, who was used to eating in filth and out of the same pot morning, noon, and night, it was pure luxury. Then she left the room and he heard her go down to the cellar. She came back with a jar of marmalade and opened it before putting it on the table.

All this time she had avoided looking at him and now, as their eyes met, she blushed and asked quickly: "Why, Hans, why don't you tell me where you have been?"

"I was at the priest's house," he answered matter-of-factly. "I washed and shaved there." But there was some hidden laughter in his eyes, and he seemed indeed quite



different this morning, even gentle. Something new that she liked and could not quite explain appeared to be in his face.

Silently she sat down opposite him. And as he faced her with an expression of combined strength and tenderness she had to hold on to the table; and her lips opened ever so little as she bent forward in suspense.

"I asked the priest whether he could marry us today," Hans said, and added: "He said yes, that he could."

Before he spoke she had sensed what he was going to say. But now he had really said it. She was unable to speak or to lay her hand on his, as she wanted to. And only gradually the color returned to her cheeks.

She looked even lovelier than on that wonderful first day on the other side of the range, Hans thought. He had wondered what her expression would be like when he proposed to her—and how crude his imaginings had been. Now her bewilderment touched his heart and her excitement excited him. It was so long since he had made anyone happy, even in a lesser way, that he hardly believed what he saw now.

"Say, yes, you want to marry me," said Hans.

"Yes," she said, and once more, "yes," in a whisper and with a smile. Then she buried her head in her arms.

He bent forward and stroked her hair, lightly, barely touching it. In a flash how different everything had become, now that he thought of her as his bride!

They did not speak for a long while.

For this I have come home, he thought. Just for this. No man can go on living without it.

The priest had celebrated Mass and had preached his sermon before empty pews. His voice had been very weak, and the echo from the high church walls had sounded like a distant wind to his ears. He had related the story of the Prodigal Son to the wide emptiness of the nave, and re-

peated the words that there was more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine saints. Leaving church after Mass he had looked down toward the square, where the morning assembly of the évacués was coming to an end. He heard the announcement that in the afternoon the "Circus of the Thousand Lions" would give a performance for the children. When the children, with voices that rang like bells, sang the Horst Wessel song—

For the last time the call to arms is sounded,  
In battle now we stand prepared and stronger.  
Soon Hitler flags will wave on every barricade,  
Our servitude will last but little longer.—

he retired to his study and lay down on the old creaking sofa, letting his worn eyes rest upon the musket in the corner till he fell asleep.

He was still asleep in the afternoon when the circus performance cheered the sad children who had come to the strange mountain village from the ruins of once magnificent Berlin. They held their breaths as the acrobat boy and the girl, no older than themselves, flew somersaulting through the air in their colored tights as if they were no heavier than feathers. The children shrieked with laughter at the clown, and at the silly stories he told them, and they strained their necks to watch the tall man doing his stunts on the tight-rope that had been stretched between high poles across the square.

State Counselor von Kraus had come from his estate to the village to watch the performance. During the intermission he mingled graciously with the mothers of the children, scattering nice, comforting words. SS Commander Meissner also put in an appearance. The évacuée woman from Aunt Minna's house felt deeply honored at the way he congratulated her for her excellent fighting spirit, which had been reported to him. Standing at attention she swallowed his words like honey, even if she did not approve of

the young woman who moved in the entourage of the SS leader.

The countess was very pale this afternoon, and the harsh red which she used on her lips gave her an air of decadence, of perversion. Perverted—that was the word the *évacuée* woman found for her.

It was during the main act after the intermission that an event took place which in no time blasted the peaceful Sunday atmosphere and produced far-reaching consequences for many people. The circus performers—the tall man and the two children—were all balancing on the tight-rope, while the clown played a slow waltz on his hand-organ.

The boy had just climbed to his father's shoulders and was straightening up and throwing kisses to the applauding audience. Now the tall man reached for the girl, who was to climb in turn onto her brother's shoulders. The audience became utterly quiet as the girl lifted herself from the rope, which, under the shifting of weight, began to swing from side to side.

Into this moment of high suspense a shot-like sound broke, shattering the breathless silence; then a second and a third similar sharp noise. The distracted performers lost their balance, the tight-rope began to swing wildly, and only by sheer magic did the tall man and the two children avoid falling to the ground and breaking their necks. A cry of horror rose from the crowd of children, but the three performers safely reached the supporting post and slid down.

No one knew what had happened, but all eyes turned in the direction whence the loud reports had come—the church on the hill—and saw the sky full of little pieces of paper that floated from the bell tower and were scattered by the wind all over the square and the village.

The children thought that these bits of paper, falling somehow from nowhere out of the sky, were a part of the

circus program. They quickly recovered from their shock and, shouting gaily, chased about wildly to catch the papers.

One of the papers had been blown smack against Meissner's chest; the countess caught it, looked at it, turned it over, and handed it to him, smiling viciously. It was one of those leaflets which for some time now had been making their mysterious appearance everywhere in Germany. On one side was printed in bold capital letters: DOWN WITH THE WAR—DEATH TO HITLER AND HIS SS—PEACE AND FREEDOM. On the other side was a quotation from a speech which Air Marshal Goering had made at the beginning of the war. It read: "Above all, we have seen to it that the enemy cannot bomb Germany."

Pale, but in complete control of himself, Meissner turned to his adjutant, the silent lieutenant with the face as sharp as a knife, and snapped his orders: "Have every leaflet confiscated. Nobody may leave the village. Every SS post as far as Dresden is to be informed; traffic on all roads from the village is to be halted; people who have left the village since this morning are to be arrested. Every house and barn in the village is to be thoroughly searched."

The lieutenant blew his whistle, and the SS men who had watched the performance from the front of the SS command rushed across the square. The fanatical *évacuée* woman was already busy on her own initiative collecting the leaflets, furiously tearing them out of the children's hands.

Captain Meissner, followed by the countess and State Counselor von Kraus, walked up the hill to the bell tower. He seemed to know what he was looking for. At the foot of the tower they found a wooden board. This board, falling down from the belfry and twice striking the buttresses of the tower base, and then the stone walk, had made the arresting sounds. Meissner went on, and they followed him into the tower. As he pushed aside the ropes hanging so use-

lessly from the belfry, they saw that the thick dust that covered the floor of the tower had turned to mud in a wide circle. In the middle of the wet black circle lay a great milk can.

"What does that mean?" the counselor asked, a little out of breath and wiping the perspiration from his reddened face with a dazzlingly white handkerchief.

"Simple old trick," Meissner explained. "The board we found outside had been balanced on the sill of one of the belfry windows. On the outer end of the board the leaflets had been placed; on the inner, this can filled with water. And here you can see a hole in the can through which the water slowly ran out. When the leaflet side of the board became heavier than the other side, the board fell and the leaflets snowed down upon us."

The lieutenant appeared at the tower door and reported: "Orders carried out!"

"Arrest the priest," Meissner commanded.

"You are making a mistake," the counselor intervened quickly. "The priest is a very old, weak man; he could never have done it."

"Arrest the priest," repeated Meissner, but the lieutenant was already on his way.

The countess, holding to one of the ropes, watched Meissner bend down and look in the dust around the circle of mud for clues and footprints.

"You look like a dog sniffing the scent," she said after a while, with deliberate malice.

Meissner pretended not to hear, but she saw the veins on his temples swell, and smiled.

Hans had wanted to go down to the priest before noon, but Leni insisted on wearing her mother's wedding dress, which she had carefully kept in the attic chest all these years, just for this day. She unpacked it and pressed it while Hans watched her, but when she wanted to try it on, she

made him go outside. Then she had sent a peasant woman, who had passed by on the road, with a note for her aunt at the estate, asking her, and old August, to come to witness her wedding.

It was afternoon before these two arrived at the house—the aunt quiet and serious as always, even a shade more so, old August full of reminiscences of his own wedding back at the turn of the century—in the good old times, as he put it.

When the four arrived at the village, which they entered by the back road in order to reach the church without arousing too much attention, they were just in time to see the SS arresting the priest. Two men were pushing the old man out of the house and down the hill. Suddenly he staggered and fell, and slumped down—a little motionless black mound in his soutane.

Hans held Leni back and drew her behind a wall. Aunt Minna and old August rushed over to the priest; they were back in a few moments.

“He is dead,” Leni whispered, her eyes wide and frightened. She looked down at her wedding dress, then at Hans who had gripped his pistol.

## VIII

THEY walked up the mountain road back to the lonely house—Leni and Hans in front, her aunt and old August a few steps behind them. In silence, slowly and wearily, they moved like people returning from a funeral. Only half an hour ago they had come down the same road, to a wedding.

With both hands Leni lifted the long skirt of her lace wedding dress. When new, many years ago on the great day in her mother's life, the lace had been of a glistening rose color, but it had faded long since. Yet, on the way down, the dress had appeared beautiful to Leni. Now, glancing at it as she picked her steps, she saw it as the drab and wilted thing it really was. The sparkle it had had for her was completely gone.

They were half-way up the slope when a motorcycle came roaring after them. The soldier who rode it was shouting: "*Halt! Stehen bleiben! Halt!*" They stopped, turned, and, without speaking, waited for him to come nearer.

It was the handsome corporal with the flashing white teeth. He was the one who had said that the war would end on Judgment Day, and who, only two days ago, had appeared at the house, out of the fog and rain, and had stolen into the woodshed. "You can trust him," the aunt had said. But now he was behaving like a stranger, as if he did not know who Aunt Minna was or where she lived.

After bringing the motorcycle to a stop at the roadside and bracing one foot against a stone, he shouted: "SS orders! Nobody is permitted to leave the village. Turn back and come to headquarters!"

"We are not leaving the village," Aunt Minna answered. "We live up there."

The soldier followed her gesture up the road as if he had never before seen the house on the ridge, then faced the aunt. "I don't know about that," he said doubtfully. The next moment, looking at Leni as if he were only now becoming aware of her, he exclaimed in astonishment: "Well, aren't you dressed up as if for a wedding!"

"But there was no wedding," Aunt Minna put in quickly. "When we arrived at the church, the SS were pushing the priest out of his house and down the hill. The old man collapsed and died right afterward. Why was he arrested?"

Leni instinctively recognized the corporal's suspicious look at Hans, then the question his eyes asked of her aunt. A quick, cautioning glance was the answer.

"The priest was a traitor," the soldier said guardedly. "Hundreds of leaflets were scattered from the bell tower; 'Down with the war,' was printed on them, and other things which I dare not repeat."

He paused; and to Leni the moment seemed filled with hidden satisfaction, though no one gave any sign of it. Then he continued: "The priest could not have done it alone; he must have had accomplices. The SS chief is furious. All traffic has been stopped as far as Dresden. Every house will be searched. A wide hunt has been ordered."

Leni had suddenly the impression that the soldier had followed them only to tell her aunt and old August of these SS measures. Thank God, old August had removed the secret radio from the woodshed the day before! No one would think of him in this connection; he looked much too old and harmless. Now, for his role as witness at the wedding, he had put on a long black coat and carried a huge umbrella. Leaning on it, he stared down at the village where SS men and soldiers stood at every corner, while the évacués had disappeared into the houses.

Leni's aunt seemed to have learned all she wanted. "Well, we have nothing to do with it," she said coldly. "Let them search my house from top to bottom; they'll find nothing."



And, after an almost imperceptible pause, she added casually: "They can turn the barn and the shed upside down too." She turned and walked on. And, since the soldier did not stop her, old August also walked on, swinging his umbrella playfully through the air.

Hans had stood silent and motionless through the whole scene, with an absent-minded expression, as if he had been thinking of something that had no connection at all with what was going on around him. After a few steps, as they followed Aunt Minna and August, he put an arm around Leni; only for a moment, to let it drop again.

The soldier looked after the four as they moved away. Then he swung his machine around and roared back to the village.

As they continued their climb the sun began to set, hovering lower and lower over the black rim of the Devil's Wood. Hans's weatherbeaten face gleamed like copper in the orange light; two vertical furrows above his nose marked his brow. Leni examined his face in anxious suspense, for he had not said a word since the death of the priest.

At the house he finally spoke: "Pack your things and wait for me here. I'll be back soon." And after a slight hesitation he took her into his arms. "Don't be afraid," he added and kissed her. Then he strode off boldly down to the village, carrying his head high as if he knew exactly what to do. They watched him until he disappeared into the ravine, then entered the house and sat down at the kitchen table, feeling suddenly exhausted. Leni and old August waited for Aunt Minna to speak, although she had given no indication of wanting to say anything. Sitting with her back to the window, her face was deep in shadow and seemed very pale to Leni.

They heard the nerve-racking cries of a flock of ravens winging overhead. Then the aunt brought out from the pocket of her coat a small étui of blue velvet. She put it on

the table and gazed at it strangely before pushing it with hesitating fingers toward Leni.

"I always wanted to give this to you on your wedding day," she said. "Don't open it now. Hans will get permission to leave the village and you will be married in town. I shall not be there. Open it then, and remember that my heart is with you, as if you were my own child."

Unable to speak, Leni bent forward and kissed her aunt's worn hand. When she looked up again there were tears in the eyes of this woman whom she had never seen in tears before.

"We must get back to work," Aunt Minna resumed in an attempt at a normal tone.

Leni rose after she saw her aunt start up from the table; she followed her to the window, as the glow of the setting sun touched the older woman's gray hair. The two stood, arms around each other, cheek against cheek. Old August stared straight ahead, embarrassed, till he caught sight of the velvet box that lay now so forlornly on the wide expanse of the scrubbed kitchen table, like a rock in a barren land or a blue flower in an ocher field.

Old August had known Aunt Minna all his life, but the existence of the small box was something new to him. He sensed that it must have some connection with the wild carpenter with whom she had been in love, before she was married and ever after. His fingers itched to open it.

Then Lenti, as if still unable to believe what had happened, whispered: "If we had come a little earlier I would be married now, . . ." and old August pushed the blue box out of his sight and said with unobtrusive dignity: "It's all in God's will. Not a sparrow falleth. . . ." He smiled, rose, swaying a bit, to his feet, and lifted his black umbrella with a little swing as a conductor might lift his baton for the opening of a gay piece.

The two women turned from each other to look at him. There was so much assurance in old August—so much be-

lief that in the end everything would not only come out right but would flourish in glory, as was prophesied in the Book—that Leni smiled at him. Aunt Minna too smiled, though their hearts were heavy with the weight of what had happened and with forebodings.

Leni, in smiling, suddenly felt her whole being become light, as if there were no longer anything in her to drag her down—as if she were like the two circus children. She quickly went over to old August and kissed him. At first he did not seem to realize what had happened, and then, staring at the girl in bewilderment, he blushed to the roots of his white hair.

Leni too colored. With a swift movement, she then picked up the blue box, ran out of the kitchen, and shut herself in the bedroom. After turning the key she stood for a moment among the many upholstered chairs that had been moved from the living room, which the *évacuée* woman and her children now occupied. Then she threw herself onto the bed, without thought of the frail lace of her wedding dress, and cried, burying her head in the pillows.

She heard her aunt and old August leave. A deep silence settled down upon the house. Once a bugle call sounded faintly from the village, then all was quiet again, so quiet that she listened to her heart beat for a long while. When she sat up to dry her wet eyes and cheeks, the sun had long ago disappeared behind the Devil's Wood. The veiling mists of dusk hung over the landscape, and night was falling fast.

Leni changed into her skirt and blouse, pulled out her little valise, and packed her things, as Hans had told her. For a moment she hesitated, out of superstition; then she packed the wedding dress too.

Hans ought to be back at any minute, she thought. She unlocked the bedroom door to go outside and watch for him, but, changing her mind, returned to sit on the bed,

her suitcase beside her. With the small box of blue velvet in her hands, she settled down to wait for him in the darkness. The évacués too should be arriving at any moment, and she did not want to be seen by that dreadful woman.

"It's all in God's will. Without His knowing, no sparrow can fall," she repeated to herself over and over, adding the silent hope that everything would be not only as it should be, but would flourish in glory, as was prophesied in the Book. But she believed it only half-heartedly. Perhaps one had to be as old as old August really to believe it; if one looked down the long road of his years, everything might seem different. She repeated the words and tried to reassure herself and to silence the other voices that were loud in her—the voices of her own bitter experience that warned her always to expect the worst.

The sound of a motor broke the silence—she prayed that it might be Hans and that he might have succeeded in whatever was his plan—and a car stopped before the house. The next moment she realized that it was only the searching party that had arrived. A harsh command was shouted, and then the voice of the évacuée woman (who must have been in the car) announced the number of rooms in the house.

The searching party found nothing, although the house, the barn, and the shed had been turned upside down. Every drawer stood open, the contents thrown on the floor or wherever they happened to fall; the pictures were off the walls, every piece of furniture was shifted, linens and mattresses were pulled from the beds—from attic to cellar nothing remained in place. Three SS men had worked quickly, silently, and with grim determination. Alarmingly efficient, inhuman in their utter disregard of a countrywoman's home or feelings, they had combed the place through and through.

Leni was in the act of lighting the candle on the night

table when the door was pushed open once more and the huge bulk of an SS man stepped into its frame. Her packed suitcase had aroused their suspicions. She admitted knowing that it was forbidden to leave the village and answered questions truthfully, overcoming her repugnance to talk about the day's events. The évacuée woman confirmed her answers, and added that the bridegroom was the tall front soldier who, as she said, had been walking up and down the village square with the adjutant of the SS district chief, Captain Meissner.

At this the SS men laughed and joked crudely about the interrupted wedding and offered Leni impertinent advice; yet they fell silent when they saw the pale and furious anger rise in her eyes. And the one who had been the most thorough and ruthless surprised her by saying almost in a tone of kindness: "Sorry for the mess, but war is war." That was it: they made war all the time, and against everybody!

She was alone again. The car had driven off, taking the évacuée woman and all her belongings. She was to be quartered in the priest's house, she told Leni triumphantly before leaving. Thinking of the woman's shell-shocked boy, Leni had wanted to say something pleasant to her, but could not bring herself to do so. During the search the woman had watched with unconcealed glee. "That's nothing in comparison to what happened to my things," she had said.

Leni made the beds, but was unable to restore order in the room. Exhausted, she sat down again beside her valise and blew out the low-burnt candle, which was beginning to flicker. With the sudden deep darkness which obscured the scene of disorder, the stillness was like that after a storm, when the unruly elements seem to subside. And again she held the small velvet box in her hands.

Leni did not know how long she had been waiting when she heard the front door open and then Hans's anxious call: "Leni, Leni, where are you?" Relieved and elated she ran out of the bedroom to meet him.

They embraced in the darkness. She found his hair and face wet with sweat, but did not care. It was a wonderful feeling, to know that he had hurried to her. A wave of sweetness and tenderness that came from him in mysterious ways engulfed her. And she reproached herself for having ever thought him brutal, as she had done at the barracks . . . and kissed him the more passionately.

They felt their way to the kitchen, found the lamp and lighted it. When she saw his face she knew instantly that he had not achieved what he had returned to the village for. It struck her hard. Deep in her heart she had been so childishly convinced that they would still be married that night.

She did not show her disappointment. She supported herself with her right hand against the wall between the door and the cupboard—in the left she held Aunt Minna's wedding present—and smiled at Hans as if everything were as it should be, and even flourishing in glory.

He was obviously hesitating to say what he wanted to say. He sat down and stared at her, but it was as if he did not see her, and pressed both hands to his head. It took all her strength not to break into tears.

Suddenly Hans looked up. "There is no one with authority to marry us," he said. "The SS is in command of everything."

To make it easier for him she added quietly: "And the SS did not give us permission to leave and marry somewhere else."

He looked at her for a moment in bewilderment. Then he got up very abruptly and went close to her and burst out in a voice that was unexpectedly hoarse: "I didn't ask them for permission to leave—that wouldn't help us. Only the old priest could have married us, nobody else. Not on this furlough."

She did not understand, but had no time to ask questions, for immediately she felt his hands seize her shoulders and clamp them with fingers of iron.

"I'll tell you something now," he said, "but swear to me that you will not repeat it to anyone. Swear it to me on your life."

"I swear it on my life," she said without hesitation, her heart pounding.

But he did not go on. His eyes were suddenly full of suspicion. He released her from his grip, went back to the table and sat down again. In the midst of her anxiety she was wondering why he did not take off his heavy coat.

The struggle that was going on in him was mirrored in his tense face. She watched him patiently, with increasing suspense. She sensed the importance and seriousness of what he wanted, but did not dare, to tell her. It was the first time that she had seen him hesitant and afraid. It was also the first test of his faith in her. Everything now seemed to depend on whether he would decide to unburden his soul to her.

"Our village priest knew us both," he began. "He had baptized us both and needed no papers."

He paused, got up, and crossed the kitchen.

Leni followed his every move. He stared at her and set his jaws as if he had decided to say not another word. The next moment, however, he came close and said in a low voice: "I must tell you. I can't bear it any longer alone."

But it took another moment of hesitation before he could continue: "Two weeks ago I was lying in a shell crater," he went on, "a comrade and I. The Russians had broken through. My regiment was wiped out. The other man cursed the war and the Fuehrer. After two years at the front he had at last received a furlough. He was so eager to go home, and the best he could now hope for was to be taken prisoner and sent to Russia."

He stopped abruptly. His face showed an emotion which baffled Leni; it seemed of something much more than horror.

"The comrade was killed," he resumed. "I searched his

pockets and took his furlough paper and then fought my way back to our new lines. That same day I went on furlough with the dead man's paper. If I am found out I will be treated as a traitor and deserter. And I don't want to marry you under a false name."

He stared ahead but seemed relieved. The furrows disappeared slowly from his forehead and he breathed more freely—as if, indeed, sharing his secret with her had made it bearable again.

She looked at him in complete surprise. First she did not quite believe what she had heard. Then her only thought was: "He has broken with his past." And she had to restrain a desire to throw her arms around him. Then doubts took hold of her again, and very quietly she asked: "Why did you do it, Hans?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I mean, I didn't know when I took the papers; I didn't really think what I was doing. It was on account of you too. You cannot go on killing for years without wanting to love. But it was not that alone that made me do it. So much has changed."

He had spoken haltingly, more and more as if to himself, as if he were alone. No self-pity was in his voice. It was serious and cold and almost objective. He rolled himself a cigarette, lighted it, and inhaled the smoke long and slowly, still as if he were alone. He did not look at Leni. But she could see his hand and lips trembling.

She thought of what old August had said that afternoon: "It is all in God's will. Not a sparrow falleth. . . ." But she did not say it. Instead she said softly: "I am happy, Hans. I am happy that you have come back." She would have liked to add what she felt about all that he had told her, but refrained instinctively, feeling that words of approval would only be so much salt in his raw wounds.

"You are happy that I'm a deserter," he said, looking at her with narrowing eyes. She did not know that he had not told her the whole truth—that he had shot a man to steal



his furlough. "You are happy that I'm a deserter," he repeated, with ironical pity for her in his voice—a voice that had suddenly become tinged with cruelty as he spoke slowly, making a pause after every word.

Instantly she sensed that he had arrived at a dangerous crossing. One road led to regret at having given away his secret (and there was no saying where that road might end), the other to clarity, to understanding, to the chance of a new beginning.

She was unable to think. What could she say that would be adequate to guide him? She trembled under the responsibility. Then an inner power came to her aid. She smiled at him, tentatively, and, though not clearly aware of the consequences, she felt that she was doing right.

She opened the little box. On white satin lay a necklace—a small golden heart on a thin chain. Tenderly she lifted it up for him to see. "It's a heart," she said, "a little heart." And as she saw the astonished expression on his face, she explained: "Aunt Minna gave it to me as a wedding present. She said to open it when we are married."

She waited. Then she put on the necklace. As Hans got up and made an uncertain step toward her, she flew into his arms.

Returning from the house to the estate, Aunt Minna and old August took the foot path that led across the wide clearing between the Devil's Wood and the Eastern Woods. Old August, walking a few steps behind her, asked suddenly: "Do you think that the friends will be caught?"

"What friends?"

"The ones that did it."

"Did what?"

"Sent the leaflets flying."

They had spoken while walking, the woman not even turning her head, though there had been a tone of surprise in her voice and then of impatience. Old August knew that

he had made her angry; he had feared as much, that was why he had hesitated so long before asking. But he had not been able to hold back the question. If she had answered by saying that the SS would not find those who had sent the leaflets flying from the bell tower—that is, if she had said it in a convincing way—it would have been a great relief, at least for a while. He was weary of violence, of people sacrificing themselves for this or that. He was tired even of the courage the friends had shown. What was the use? Of course, he was as ready as ever for anything they might ask of him, but he was sometimes tired of it all just the same. He longed for a life without conspiracies, in which one could say yes or no and have it mean yes or no, and for a peaceful time in which people died a natural death. It was a comfort to say, "It's all in God's will," and he said it often to strengthen himself, but for a long time now the world had made no real sense to him.

"It's a mistake to ask questions like that," Aunt Minna commented, plodding steadily ahead.

"I know," he answered. "But it would do me a lot of good if I could think that they were safe. Please, tell me, do they have a chance?"

The aunt remained silent. Not until they were almost at the entrance of the estate did she speak. "The job was done properly," she said firmly. "No mistakes were made. They have a chance, I am sure."

"Thank God," said old August, lifting his umbrella a bit and swinging it—but it was a feeble gesture.

Walking side by side now on the service road toward the side door of the large house, they heard hysterical cries from around the bend where the broad lawn sloped from the terrace to the mountain stream—a woman's voice screaming in horror, subsiding in agony, suddenly falling silent.

"It's the young one," said Aunt Minna, quickening her pace.

"I hope nothing serious has happened," murmured old August, trying to keep step.

The "young one" was an expectant mother, in her early twenties, who had arrived at the estate only a few weeks ago. She never mingled with the other guests—the women and children of high party officials whom State Counselor von Kraus had invited for reasons of his own. Aunt Minna had soon volunteered to serve the young woman's meals in her own room. She was a very quiet person, uncomplaining and undemanding, which could not be said of the others. When she was not walking in the park (where she was always alone, moving slowly and carefully through the long alleys), she would sit at her window, working on baby clothes, or writing long letters to her husband, an officer in the tank corps. She and Aunt Minna never exchanged a single personal word, but sometimes they looked at each other as if they knew and understood what was in their hearts.

At the side door leaned a man in mufti whom neither the aunt nor old August had ever seen before. He scrutinized them but said no word as they passed him to enter the house. Inside Aunt Minna whispered: "The Gestapo. They will question us separately. Just say where we were and why. I'll do the same."

It was plain that dinner would be late that evening, with the Gestapo investigation of guests and servants taking no end of time. State Counselor von Kraus and Countess Beate had been questioned first. It had been a mere formality, especially as both of them had been in Meissner's company practically all that day and the day before.

The counselor was pouring himself a glass of port in his study, a spacious paneled room, when the countess entered without knocking. She wore the tight-fitting low-cut green wool evening dress that gave her the sensual, serpentine appearance of which Meissner never tired. The state coun-

selor felt his pulse quicken as she closed the door and leaned against it, straightening her almost childlike body.

"The captain phoned he would be late," she said. "Can you stand my company? All those empty rooms make me nervous."

It seemed to the counselor that she was not nervous at all. And, although he answered, "Of course, my dear—nothing I should like better," he cautioned himself to be on guard. "I am nervous myself, or rather, upset," he added. "The priest was an old friend of mine." He offered her a glass of port.

"Port always makes me feel important," she said smilingly. "I'll take one." Without moving from the door she watched the counselor pour the wine. It was at that moment that the "young one" screamed on the lawn below. They both listened. The smile fled from the countess's face for an instant, but when the counselor looked at her, it was there again as if nothing had happened.

He brought her the wine, his tall, broad frame towering over her. She observed his steady, powerful hand offering her the delicate glass.

"May I ask, Herr Counselor, how old you are?" she said.

"Sixty," he answered curtly.

"Three times my age." Her voice sang, but her eyes were expressionless as she took the glass and sipped from it, staring over the rim.

"Won't you sit down?" he remarked, feeling uncomfortable.

"Later."

She crossed to the wide French window and surveyed the darkening landscape outside. The first stars were beginning to glitter in the clear, deep blue sky.

The counselor sat down in a capacious leather armchair. Sixty! Three times her age! he thought, and returned to the problem he had been pondering before the countess's entrance. The question was how to retain power over the

vast industrial empire he had built, extending over all of Europe, in the event of Germany's defeat.

It was not simply a question of his personal fortune. He had sufficient funds in Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey to enable him to live in his accustomed style to the end of his days. It was a question of power—of himself, of Captain of Industry von Kraus's remaining on the bridge of his ship, whatever happened. It was himself against everybody; in a sense, himself against history! And to an extent he relished this challenging proposition, for he needed strong opposition to bring his powers into full play.

The numerous properties he had acquired in the conquered countries—factories, mines, railroads—had become his in a strictly "legal" way. He had paid in cash for everything. That he himself had set the price, with the help of the victorious German army, and that the printed paper with which he had paid was worth little, were quite another matter. But not a matter to worry about. Any attempt at reclamation would be hopeless. He had sold and resold the properties between companies he controlled, had partitioned them and shuffled and reshuffled them. It would take years to trace who had sold to whom and for what price, not to speak of the investments and improvements he had made and the many physical changes that had taken place during these years. It would be easier to reconstruct in detail a city destroyed by the war than to restore the economic structure he had replaced with his own, a structure whose ramifications were known only to him.

This thought, however, was comforting only so long as "legal" titles were respected. If the Russians were to march into Europe that would not be the case. But it was pointless to consider this possibility. Of course, he could become a commissar, his knowledge would be indispensable, but, after his experiences with the Nazi party, that was not to his taste. On the other hand, if the British and Americans came first and their system survived, the question would be how

to link up with them, how to unite with them in the most profitable way, dividing the spoils with them, if necessary, but remaining the master on the bridge.

"How much longer can we hold out?" the countess asked, interrupting the silence.

The counselor was on his guard. "What do you mean?" he said, assuming a perplexed expression.

"You know what I mean," she answered sharply. "Or perhaps you don't."

She looked at him with the arrogance that only the members of the old aristocracy could summon. (The counselor's father had been a common "Herr Kraus" until, in consideration of a fortune, he had become "*Herr von Kraus*" by grace of Kaiser Wilhelm.) This contemptuous look, and the nearness of the girl, irritated and provoked Counselor von Kraus; her arrogance angered him, but at the same time he admired it. And he felt the desire to impress her, to convince her that he was a very powerful man, with far more influence than Meissner. . . . To take her away from that card-sharp Meissner would be a great satisfaction, indeed.

The countess sat down in the opposite armchair, and the expression on her face changed suddenly. It took on the seriousness that only children sometimes have. The change almost frightened the counselor.

"Against whom are we holding out?" the countess asked, "We, the aristocrats, and you, the upper bourgeoisie. Against whom? And for more than a hundred years too long. Against our own people! You never had the character or the strength to overthrow us; not in 1848, and never since. You just aped us in bad taste and licked our boots."

There was a moment of silence, during which the counselor tried to recover from his surprise. And he became alarmed. Forgotten was the desire to impress her. Where did this girl get such ideas? Did they talk that way now in the castles and on the estates—these flimsy nobles whom the bourgeoisie had so often saved from bankruptcy? Was

a new front rising—the criminals and the nobles against big business? Would they pull him down with them when the great debacle came?

Sweat broke out on the counselor's forehead, though he managed to ask in a benevolent tone, as if to a child: "Are these your own ideas, Countess?"

Ignoring him she continued, haltingly, placing every word carefully, as if to express something that was new and not yet clear even to herself: "Ten years ago we, and you, placed the criminals in power. Why? Because we felt ourselves too weak to suppress the people any longer. They reached for our privileges and we did not want to give them up, though we had no right any more—if we ever had—to keep them. We armed bandits and gave them prestige. They terrorized the people into a war through which we hoped to save ourselves. It was a great plan; it seemed to work. But now we know—it has failed."

She laughed in curious shrill delight, the childlike seriousness disappearing from her face. She was again the exciting aristocrat whom the counselor would have liked to impress.

"Yes, Counselor," she laughed, "we are in the hands of the criminals and they are losing the war. And this time no foreign power will help us against the people. And should they try, they will be doomed too. Soon not only leaflets will fly. *Après nous le déluge*. May I have another port?"

"You are frightened," said the counselor uneasily.

"Yes," she answered curtly. "But I have the happy disposition of being able to forget unpleasant things easily. Won't you give me another port?"

"But why are you frightened?"

"The sins of my fathers have been visited upon me, but I have to stand by loyally. I cannot desert now. Do you understand what it means to be as young as I am and as knowing? I stand at the end of a world when my life is at its beginning. I see the new world, but I cannot step over into

it. I am skeptical, cynical, spoiled. I was born that way and can't help it. And even if I could—well, you know I have paid my price to the criminals. That cannot be changed, and I have to make the best of it . . . though I don't want to say that I have no compensations."

She leaned back in the deep chair and stretched her slender body. A smile circled about her lips like something alien that did not belong to her.

"You are beautiful, Countess," said the counselor in a voice that took him by surprise, so far back out of his youth did it seem to come. "You are beautiful." He bent forward and, more because he was irresistibly drawn to her than by design, he put a hand softly on her knee. It seemed as if he were touching her skin under the thin wool dress. She did not move. He allowed his hand to stay where it was and moved it caressingly.

"The world is so huge," he whispered. "We Germans have never really known that. That is our misfortune. But nothing is lost for us two. Sweden, Switzerland, South America—there is so much left. Come with me. I have funds everywhere. I will treat you tenderly. I will live only for you; all I have is yours. . . ."

He was on his knees. She looked at him and her face became womanly as she smiled softly.

The deep silence between them was broken by the horn blast from a car approaching swiftly through the park below. The look on the countess's face changed instantly; it became hard and cruel, and she straightened up to get to her feet. But the counselor, as if he had not heard, clung to her, still on his knees.

"Promise that you will come with me," he begged. "Promise, Beate, my beautiful, lovely child!"

She pushed him away. Looking down at him for a moment—his face was so red and beefy—she freed herself and left quickly, closing the door noiselessly.

He stared after her. When he heard the voice of Meissner



and the countess's laughter together in the hall, his eyes became wide with fear. He had wanted to be on guard—and he had lost his head.

Meissner was accompanied by the district Gestapo chief whom he had summoned from Dresden. Together they had been at it all afternoon without success. They had not the slightest idea as to who had scattered the leaflets from the bell tower; they did not even have any suspects.

That the priest had died was, of course, unfortunate. He might have known the whole story, and they would have made him talk. Against death, however, even the Gestapo and SS in combination were powerless. They had arrested a woman who had visited the priest in the morning, but thus far nothing useful had been extracted from her.

Meissner and the Gestapo man entered the study of State Counselor von Kraus just as that gentleman, looking older than usual, was pouring himself another port. Of course, he placed the study at their disposal, especially as they had already ordered all reports from the wide hunt that was under way to be made to them at the estate.

Before dining the two men sat down to examine the results of the investigation that had been conducted on the estate itself. There had been the incident with the pregnant wife of the tank corps officer: she had irrationally refused to be questioned and had then suddenly hurled all kinds of treasonable accusations against the investigating Gestapo official. She had revealed herself as one of those secret enemies of the Third Reich who were so difficult to apprehend, and she had, of course, been arrested. But unquestionably she had nothing whatever to do with the leaflets.

They went over the answers of guests and servants as to their whereabouts and movements for the last few days. Nothing there. They snickered over the bride and bride-

groom who had come too late to be married. When Meissner's adjutant reported who the bridegroom was, Meissner laughed still more, annoyed with Hans—an old Nazi—for wanting to be married in church.

It was toward midnight when the report came that the woman who had visited the priest in the morning had confessed that a soldier had been in the priest's house when she was there. She maintained that she had not seen his face, for according to her statement, he had been in the priest's bedroom all the time. She had seen him only once through the half-open door. He was a tall, fair-haired fellow—that was all she remembered.

"Hans," Meissner said to himself; "it may have been Hans making arrangements for his wedding." He dismissed the thought that his old party friend could have any connection with the leaflets. But that was merely his first reaction. Upon short reflection he ordered: "Bring him here."

## I X

THE blackout curtains were closely drawn in the lonely house on the mountain ridge, as they were at every window in Germany and, for that matter, over almost the whole continent of Europe. The lamp that hung from the ceiling threw only a dim circle of light onto the table. Except for the flickering firelight from the stove, the kitchen lay in darkness.

The house was very quiet since the évacuée woman had departed. And between the soldier and the girl on the sofa all was so still that they could hear the faint sounds that swished past the windows outside. Leni knew it was the old forest trees creaking in their sleep, but she wanted to nestle closer to Hans and hold his hand more tightly.

It was a solemn hour for them. Leaning against his shoulder holding his heavy hand, she felt secure for the first time in many years. He was like a rock, hard and strong. The confusion and the continual hopeless ache had left her heart. The past seemed from moment to moment more unreal. It was as if they had moved into another world, a world of their own. Bending over and pressing her cheeks caressingly against his hands, the feeling came to her that even if they were to die the next minute some reflection of this hour would flicker across into eternity.

And his experience was no less deep or new than hers. Yet, having grown up during the foul and hungry years that had led to the war, having been trained as a killer and having lived as one so long, he distrusted these finer emotions. The very tenderness he felt tended to make him hard again. While he lifted Leni's head and kissed her and stroked her hair, the cynical voices of his past made sneering comments, comparing him, the deserter running after

a skirt, with the incorruptible fighter he once had been.

So much had changed! Never before had he thought of a girl as his equal, and now he was almost on the point of saying again: "I don't deserve you, Leni." Instead he pushed away the table and moved into the middle of the kitchen, into the firelight. It colored his face as had the sun that afternoon on their walk home from the wedding that did not take place.

Everything came back to Leni in that moment, but she forbade herself to think of it now: no thought of past or future must cloud this hour. Yet as she looked at Hans, wishing that she might see him forever in this glowing light, she felt that she had already stepped back into the other reality which she was trying to hold at bay. "Wait!" her eyes begged him, but he seemed no longer to understand the silent language of the heart.

"Listen," he said in a tone of command, "I have not told you anything. You don't know that I am on a dead man's furlough. You don't know it! You'll not talk about it!"

"How little you know of me," she wanted to say, but heard herself answer obediently: "I know nothing. I won't talk."

"Not a word to anyone!"

"Not one word."

She was about to smile at him when an expression came into his face that chilled her.

In silence she watched him bend to the floor, pick up the remains of a cigarette that he had tossed toward the stove earlier, and light it. After two puffs he threw it away again. Then he crossed quickly to the door and looked out as if suddenly afraid that someone might be listening. Closing the door he remained standing near it in the darkness. All she could see of him was the faint glimmer of the Iron Cross first class on his tunic.

After a while he began to speak again, haltingly this time, as if thinking aloud: "Until today I have never been afraid.

All I had were things to die for. Now I want so much to live."

After an interval, his voice seemed to come from afar: "I never really knew what drove me home that way . . . like a deserter. I thought only of a change, a change for a few days."

She held her breath. If only he would say the right words now! Even his leaving her would be bearable if he would only say the right words.

Unexpectedly he laughed, his short metallic burst of unhappy laughter that broke off so abruptly. And moving into the flickering light again, he scoffed: "We had it all figured out! We forced ourselves to become machines to conquer the whole universe. Now even this little world is conquering us. We turned out to be human after all! If I had not come home I might never have known it. Perhaps I should have turned back when that girl spat in my face as my welcome home. Or when my sister was horrified to see me still alive. Or when my father threw me out. Only my mother still loved her son." He sounded as if he would break into a laugh again, but he did not.

Leni hurried over to him. Embracing him timidly, she spoke in tears: "But I too love you, Hans. You must know it by now. I have always loved you, since I was a child. I have always——"

She fell silent at the iron grip of his hands.

"Everything has changed," he repeated the refrain, his voice hoarse, "everything. But I'm still what I've always been. I shall never change, never give in."

He uttered these harsh, defiant words, but she felt him tremble and his grip on her shoulders weaken, and she clung to him.

It had grown extraordinarily quiet. Even the old forest trees had ceased creaking. Then the walls began to echo: ". . . only things to die for . . . everything changed . . . I am what I have always been. . . ."

Leni tried to hear the tumult of his inner battle. His words were still the old words, but he was on his way out of the wilderness. How much she wanted to help him! If only she knew how. . . .

Like a recurring motif, the rumble of a motorcycle broke the silence. It grew rapidly louder. For a moment it seemed as if the motorcycle would shoot past the house, but it came to an abrupt stop. A short pause, and heavy knocks fell on the front door.

Not a muscle moved in Hans's face. His eyes steady, cold, his lips grim, he ordered: "Open the door, Leni! Don't look frightened. Let's see first what they want."

The knocks came louder, more insistent. Leni pulled herself together and went into the passage. Hans listened without moving, heard a rough, military voice asking for him.

Swiftly he was beside the chair over which his belt hung and had reached for his gun.

Soon after Captain Meissner had ordered Hans to be brought in, he received a telephone call from the SS High Command in Berlin. Countess Beate, in whose room he took the call, could see from his face that he was listening to something extremely pleasing to him. The very fact that she was able to observe it was in itself proof of the degree of his delight, for he was not readily given to showing what he felt.

As he put down the receiver, the smile that appeared about his thin lips sent a chill through her, although she had thought herself dead to feeling and beyond fear ever since she had surrendered to Meissner's ultimatum. In thinking of that long past moment now, an image occurred to her: spring changing into winter overnight. Nevertheless, she kept her poise. A long line of proud ancestors sustained her. She felt them all assembled within her as she met Meissner's glance.

"I have orders to arrest our host," he said, "and send him to Dachau." And he added: "You are invited to witness the historic scene."

"I accept your invitation," she answered quietly.

With deliberate capriciousness she adjusted the comb in her hair—enjoying Meissner's impatience—then searched through a suitcase before she found the handkerchief she was looking for, or pretending to.

The two crossed to the library, where they had left the counselor a short time ago. An SS guard at the head of the staircase snapped to attention as they passed, the click of his heels echoing along the corridor. The whole house seemed asleep, as if all the guests were tired out from the long investigation. The Gestapo men had gone to the SS command in the village to question some new suspects who had been arrested, among them the circus folk. For it had occurred to Meissner that these people were by training better equipped than any others for conveying leaflets, a pail of water, and a wooden board up into the belfry by way of the bell ropes. That these articles had been transported in such a fashion up the great height of the bell tower had, in the meantime, been established by Gestapo experts summoned from Dresden.

Counselor von Kraus sat at the broad desk in the library writing a letter to his favorite nephew serving with the Luftwaffe in Italy. When Meissner and the countess entered he looked up, irritated at first by the interruption, but he smiled as, shading his eyes, he recognized them. His smile was not merely polite or self-protective. The countess, standing slightly behind the captain, was making signs which he did not quite understand but which, it seemed, were an attempt to improvise some sort of conspiracy between them against the captain. Perhaps she had changed her mind and was willing to accept his offer to flee with him to a neutral country; perhaps she had told Meissner about it and had brought him to talk business. This black-

mailer's price would be exorbitant, but on the other hand . . . the flow of von Kraus's optimistic thoughts ceased sharply as Meissner sat down opposite him—and smiled.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Herr State Counselor," said Meissner.

The counselor expected him to continue, to give a reason for his late visit; but Meissner remained silent. His lips a tight line, perhaps a nuance tighter than usual, he looked at his host without expression. Or was there an expression in the depths of those unbearably steely eyes, a glimmer of something undefinable? Undefinable even for a man like Herr von Kraus, who in his long life had fought thousands of verbal duels with opponents of every caliber and had always prided himself on his ability to unmask a face in no time. And presently, though nothing in Meissner's attitude directly indicated it, the state counselor had the unmistakable feeling of danger closing in on him from every side.

He threw a quick glance at the countess. She was standing quite a distance from the desk, behind Meissner, leaning against one of the bookcases that lined the walls of the wide room. She had stretched her right arm along a shelf filled with the works of Goethe, the counselor observed, while his brain worked frantically for the key to a situation that was growing more uncomfortable with every moment of Meissner's ominous silence. And it was not only the mere presence of the countess that imposed on Kraus an emotional strain; she further complicated the situation by trying to convey some message to him behind her lover's back. She lifted a handkerchief which she was holding in one outstretched hand, as if she wanted him to see something she was hiding under it on the book shelf. But he was near-sighted, and the spot to which she was calling his attention was outside of the desk lamp's range. He was not able to make out a thing and did not dare look too intently for fear of arousing Meissner's suspicion.



The captain, however, seemed to have noticed his furtive glances. "If you are wondering about the presence of the countess," he said casually, "she really has nothing to do with our business. She just came along as a sympathetic observer and"—Meissner paused an instant—"to amuse herself instead of being bored waiting for me."

The word business in Meissner's scarcely illuminating explanation of the countess's presence stood out to the counselor as a clear, solid thing in a sea of fog. He took hold of it immediately, as Meissner expected.

"And what is our business?" Herr von Kraus asked. Then, feeling better after these words, he concluded that the captain had come to blackmail him, as was the time-honored custom of the SS.

"'Business' is not the correct word," Meissner replied. "'Act of State' might be *le mot juste*. A few minutes ago I received an order from Berlin to transmit to you an important decision of the SS High Command."

"I am all ears." Von Kraus leaned back, striking his statesman-like pose and feeling almost completely relieved—until his eyes again caught sight of the countess. The instant she saw him looking in her direction she began again to signal with her handkerchief. There could be no doubt that she wanted him to see some object she had placed on the shelf and was covering with her handkerchief.

"The SS High Command is seriously concerned with the morale of certain party circles, especially among those members of the present higher leadership who joined us old fighters only after we had seized power. They serve the Third Reich only for opportunist reasons and without those stern convictions that make true National Socialists of even the lowest rank so invincible."

Now it was Kraus's turn to smile. Of course he was one of those so-called opportunists, but Meissner knew as well as he that it was individuals like himself who had really made it possible for the so-called old fighters to "seize" power, or,

more accurately, to accept the present of power which was handed to them at the very moment when they were rapidly losing popular support.

With a curt gesture of his right hand Kraus dismissed the captain's words, and straightening himself he queried sharply: "And what is it that you have been ordered to tell me, Captain?" His voice conveyed impatience, and the contemptuous emphasis he put on the word "captain" was intended to remind Meissner of his inferior rank. The SS was all powerful, but a state counselor was after all high above a simple SS captain.

Von Kraus behaved accordingly, but he did not deceive himself about the fact that he was merely trying to camouflage a growing sense of insecurity. And the instant he saw Meissner's smile, he regretted having snubbed him.

"I am sorry, but I have not been ordered simply to give you some news, Herr State Counselor," Meissner replied quietly. "I only said that the SS High Command has come to certain important decisions, and that these decisions concern a group of people to whom you belong."

"I assume you will come to the point when you see fit, no use urging you," Kraus answered, laughing uneasily. Meissner had finally succeeded in arousing real fear in his heart.

A moment of silence and immobility passed. Then Kraus got up, apparently to put a new log on the fire. He was convinced at last that the countess was trying to help him in some way.

At the exact moment when the counselor passed between her and the captain, she lifted the handkerchief. What the counselor saw gave him a very unpleasant shock. He who was accustomed to liquidate his opponents with words written on papers called contracts, or "gentlemen's agreements," faced a small, shiny Browning pistol, which disappeared swiftly under the handkerchief again.

Von Kraus placed the log on the fire. Though he appeared

to be a strong man, the task seemed too strenuous for him. He became out of breath and had to wipe the perspiration from his face. "Meissner is playing cat and mouse with me," he thought, "and she is assisting him. That's why she is here, to induce me to some foolish action, to give him a pretext to——" Yes, to do what? What did these two want of him? What was their game? The counselor no longer believed this palaver about important decisions of the High Command, but he was all the more afraid.

Without looking at the countess or her tricks he went back to his chair. He was not to be the old fool they thought him to be. Then, as he leaned back and was about to tell the captain to leave the decisions of the High Command till morning, something snapped in him. "For God's sake," he cried, "what are you up to? What kind of a joke is this?"

"What kind of a joke?" echoed Meissner, and unexpectedly he began to laugh—a coarse, vulgar laugh that was in complete contrast to his Machiavellian bearing. Kraus was even more frightened by this laughter than he had been by the captain's smile.

In the silence which followed this supposedly unmotivated outburst, Meissner, again the polished cynic, said in a tone of affected benevolence: "It will be a pretty serious joke on you, Herr State Counselor, and as a poet I can give you only one piece of advice: Discard your soul now. You will feel much easier without it."

"As a poet? My soul?" Von Kraus was honestly perplexed.

"Yes, that Jewish conception of a thing nobody has ever seen. That phantom which is supposed to make the human animal—I use 'human' for want of a better word—a representative of an equally nonexistent higher being. As a result, you think of yourself as unique and irreplaceable. But you are not. None of us is. Whether you exist or not makes not the slightest difference. Not even to yourself—that is, as soon as you discard your so-called soul. And in order to make things more pleasant for you—as you have

sometimes made things more pleasant for me—I advise you from now on to be nothing but the animal you are. Animal number so-and-so. For technical reasons this mathematical distinction cannot be avoided. But that's all you will be—a number—till you die.”

“What do you mean?” the counselor panted.

Meissner rose to his feet. “You are under arrest, Herr State Counselor. You will presently be on your way to the concentration camp at Dachau. You are permitted to take a blanket, a toothbrush, and your eyeglasses. Nothing else.”

Von Kraus stared at the captain with wide, unbelieving eyes.

“Get up! Make yourself ready!” Meissner snapped.

The counselor did not move. “But why? Why?” Again and again the question came from his lips. And the ruddy flesh hung loosely on the powerful bone structure of his face. He was aging rapidly.

“I am not obliged to give any reasons,” Meissner answered. “But you yourself know that you entertain ideas about coming to a compromise peace with your friends in England and America, instead of thinking of our victory. You even expressed those very ideas to me. You also have cushioned your future by selling short the stocks of the Third Reich. You have stolen a fortune and transferred it to neutral countries.”

“But so has everybody else! You yourself . . .”

“Quite right,” Meissner interrupted the counselor. “But any action or thought becomes high treason the moment the SS command decides to consider it as high treason. You know that.”

Yes, Kraus indeed knew. He himself had agreed to this kind of justice for so many years. He was in no position to complain. He felt at the end—yet in the next moment he was on his feet in a miraculous resurgence of life, every inch the captain of industry again. He was even able to ignore the intense pain from the varicose veins in his legs as he

said grandly: "I offer you a million marks in dollars if you will let me escape."

Meissner again broke into that vulgar new laugh of his. "A week ago I could have arranged for you to be sent on a mission to Sweden or Switzerland, for less—and you need not have returned. Now it is too late. I have no wish to go to Dachau in your place."

The counselor turned to his telephone. "May I talk to SS headquarters?"

"No."

"To my lawyer?"

"No! He will hear of your arrest. We shall take care that all your friends know where you are, all your accomplices. You are going to be liquidated as a warning to them."

There was a moment of silence, then Meissner added sarcastically: "Perhaps they'll try to help you."

Of course, they would not, the counselor realized. In their place he wouldn't dare to move a finger, either. Realizing this, his fear of torture and death overwhelmed him. In the same degree the expression on Meissner's face grew colder. And the counselor, in spite of his desperation, could understand the captain's satisfaction. In building up his industrial empire he himself had often enjoyed similar moments, in which he had triumphantly risen into regions where no pity restrained his craving for power or soiled the scientific beauty of a coup that crushed an opponent.

Kraus bent forward as if pressed down by a heavy load that had suddenly fallen upon his shoulders. But, holding onto the desk, he kept himself upright, raised his head with an effort, his face drawn, green, glistening with sweat, and said with an attempt at bravery: "I am ready, Captain." But in the next moment he sank into his chair and cried like a child.

Meissner gave him a look of disgust, turned, and approached the door. In passing he smiled at the countess; she smiled back. In the corridor he summoned the guards and

barked detailed instructions for taking the state counselor to Dachau.

The countess used the moment quickly. She slipped over to the counselor and placed the little revolver on the desk in front of him.

The old man stopped crying, stared at the weapon, but did not touch it. When he looked up, the countess was beside the bookcase, leaning against it as before, her handkerchief between her fingers. As she looked encouragingly at the counselor, he found at last the strength to grasp the shining little weapon and conceal it in one hand.

It was at this moment that Meissner came back into the room and made straight for the counselor who stared at him as if hypnotized.

Silently Meissner took the little revolver out of his trembling hand. Then he glanced smilingly at the countess. And she returned the smile as the tramping of heavy boots outside in the corridor accumulated into a pounding that drowned out everything else.

The detection of his fraud, which Hans feared when the military voice asked for him, turned out to be the imaginings of his uneasy conscience. The SS man did not come to arrest him; he explained merely that Captain Meissner wanted to see him. It was the same man who in the afternoon had searched the house with exceptional zeal and apologized afterwards in the phrase: "War is war." Now he seemed sorry to break into their privacy. Even Leni's mortal fear for Hans subsided as she watched the intruder. It appeared to be that Meissner had responded to Hans's request to be permitted to see him, made to the captain's adjutant when Hans had gone back to the village in the effort to find someone with authority to marry them.

The motorcycle ride over the rough country road to the estate reminded Hans of his last ride at the front, the night before he had killed the comrade. In open trucks, jammed

together like sardines, they were thrown into the breach of the battle line. Hans remembered his steel helmet clicking and pounding continually against those of his neighbors as they were shaken from side to side and backward and forward on the rutted road, under an endless sky tinted by the fires burning on the horizon. How far back all that seemed—and yet not even two weeks had passed since then!

Hans remembered also the grim determination with which he had driven into his last battle, as into a hundred others, determined as always to come out alive. It had been more a matter of craftsmanship than anything else, for indeed, until now, he had had only things to die for. With even stronger determination Hans now rode beside the SS man who told him about his participation in the campaign in France—that bit of child's play!—in order to impress him. All these SS bullies seemed to have the need to put themselves on an equal footing with the front soldiers. Hans would have liked to give the fellow a piece of his mind, but kept silent prudently, for he felt in no position to make personal enemies, especially among the SS.

This thought brought Hans back to the question of the particular danger ahead of him. What if they should ask for his furlough paper? He would say he had lost it during the air bombardment in Berlin. But what if they should search him and find one in another soldier's name? Yet, on the other hand, why should Meissner want to see it? He had not asked for it when Hans had come to him in Dresden to get leave for Leni. Why should he ask for it now? But Hans decided to take no unnecessary risks. That was how he had survived a hundred battles and how he would come out of this one too, if it should turn out to be a battle.

Under the pretext of looking for a cigarette Hans went through his coat, got the furlough paper out of his pocket and threw it, unseen by the SS man who had his eyes on the road, into a ditch. It was about a kilometer from the estate, he conjectured, fixing the place in his mind.

When they entered the big house Hans saw two SS men pushing some guests and the servants—among them Leni's aunt—out of the hall into the dining room, and closing the curtained glass door in their curious, frightened faces. From the upper floor sounded sharp commands. A moment later the state counselor, rumpled, without collar or tie and so changed and aged that Hans hardly recognized him, appeared between guards on the upper landing of the grand staircase. He seemed to hesitate but the guards pushed him down the heavily carpeted stairs. There was no noise, no sound at all. The scene was a ghost-like pantomime.

Meissner appeared at the head of the staircase, also in absolute silence, and followed his men and their prisoner, his highly polished boots blinking with every step. And without any expression but that of concentration he watched the state counselor being dragged out of his own house.

Witnessing this arrest Hans remembered many things. During a long period in his youth, before he understood from which direction the wind blew in this world, Hans had been mystified by the fact that Herr von Kraus, the rich man of the county, always had much more than he could ever use, while many people in the village and the lumbermen in the forests had barely enough to exist on. "He spends more in one day on his dogs than entire families have for a month's living," Hans as a child had once heard someone say. And he had never forgotten it. No, he felt no sympathy for this broken man now being dragged from his palace. Indeed, he ought to have been arrested twenty years ago. It was the first thing Hans had seen since his homecoming that gave him the feeling that there was some justice after all.

He snapped to attention when Meissner approached. The captain seemed not to notice him. He was carrying a small pistol in his hand, at which he smiled, now with satisfaction and almost tenderly.

At this moment the lieutenant with the knife-sharp face



came into the hall and reported that no progress had been made in the investigation of the leaflet incident.

In a flash, Meissner gave orders: "Intimidate the suspects. Don't let them sleep. If no one cracks, release them all in the morning but have them kept under observation." And turning to Hans he asked sharply: "What were you doing in the priest's house?"

"I washed and had a shave, and asked him whether he could marry me and Leni, my bride-to-be. He told me yes, that he could dispense with formalities because I have to go back to the front in a few days."

"Was anybody else in the house?"

"An elderly woman. I was in the bedroom and heard them talking, but did not listen." Hans lied with the intention of keeping quite clear of the affair of the leaflets.

The captain snapped at the lieutenant: "Take the sergeant down to the village. See whether the woman recognizes him. Make sure also that there was no other soldier there."

Speaking to Hans again, Meissner said: "That's all." Then glancing at the little revolver in his hand, he added: "If you get married—watch out. Always watch out. If you need anything call on me."

"I should like to get a permit to leave the village with my girl," Hans put in immediately.

"Lieutenant, give him a pass," Meissner ordered. Then he said, "Good night," and went up the staircase, hastening his strides.

Two hours later Hans was walking back from the village, up the mountain road to Aunt Minna's house. He made a little detour and without difficulty found the furlough paper in the ditch where he had thrown it. It was slightly damp from the dew that had begun to settle.

He was tired out. He climbed slowly, stopping again and again to stare up at the sky, which was so clear and starry

and more incomprehensible to him this night than ever before.

He had in his pocket a pass for Leni and one for himself. At last a valid paper, in his own name, signed by the SS of his home village. With it he could go far, and even be married anywhere, if he used it cleverly.

They would leave in the morning, be married somewhere, and then go to some place where nobody knew them. He was no longer afraid. He wanted to be alone with Leni, to talk just to her, or to sit quietly, holding hands and dreaming.

This mood had come over him soon after he had entered the village SS command with the lieutenant. He had been still so filled with the continuous excitements of the day that at first he did not realize what was coming over him. He felt only that something new oppressed him. Then suddenly he realized! He had come back into the house where he had grown up, into his father's house! True, he had passed it in the morning and looked at it, but he had easily repressed the impulse to go in when he saw that the SS command was quartered in it. Now it suddenly meant a great deal to have come back to the place from which he had run away so many years ago. And he could not help brooding on how different his life might have been if he had stayed on in this house.

Everything in it was changed. He recognized only odd pieces of furniture, but each one brought some long-forgotten incident of his childhood back to his mind. And strangely enough, it seemed to him now that it had been a wonderful time.

The lithographs of great poets, which his father had so reverently collected and which had covered the walls, had all disappeared. The room where the library had been, and the glass boxes with butterflies, was utterly bare of furnishings now, filled instead with the people who had been arrested—a mixed lot, trembling from fear and exhaustion.

Some were beaten up, their faces bloodstained; others were crying; women broke out in loud prayers as soon as the guard turned his back on them. Standing in dignity among them were the circus folk, stoically silent and motionless.

Hans had been in the room but a few moments when the elderly woman whom he had seen at the priest's house recognized him—but this was long enough for him to have the feeling that he was not in Germany, but somewhere in occupied territory: the people were so like people everywhere, and the SS was everywhere alike.

"I shall have to speak to Leni," Hans thought. "She'll have to tell me how it really is here at home. And I'll tell her——" He checked himself. He could never tell her the truth. . . .

In a sudden longing for Leni's warmth, Hans quickened his pace as he saw the house on the ridge outlined against the sky. As he came near he found Leni's aunt waiting in front of the house. "Where is Leni?" she asked, with fear in her voice. She had found the house empty when she returned from the estate.

Hans did not know what to say. No, he knew she had not been arrested; he had just been at SS quarters and had seen all the prisoners.

They wracked their heads over where Leni could have gone. It was only at daybreak that the aunt, drawing aside the window curtains, discovered the bloodstains on the floor. They followed them and were led out of the house, and upward across the slope.

"I'll find her, I must find her!" Hans shouted and hastened ahead; at one moment down on his hands and knees, at the next hurrying forward again, and finally disappearing in the Devil's Wood.

The aunt came behind, slowly, steadfastly. She was no longer afraid for Leni; she was proud of her.

# X

FROM the doorstep of the house Leni had been watching the lights of the motorcycle bounce down the slope, fade to a tiny flicker and disappear. For some time longer she had listened to its distant roar until the night was silent again, save for the sough of the old forest trees creaking in their sleep.

It had happened so quickly. One moment Hans had been closer to her than ever before; the next he was gone. He had no choice. Whoever wanted to live obeyed the SS. Raising her eyes from the darkness of the land to the sky, Leni began to pray. To pray that Hans might return safely and not be subjugated again by Captain Meissner. And as the strength that came from her prayer filled her heart, it was as if the whole firmament, every star in the Milky Way, and the remotest lights of heaven were smiling upon her. Then one of the stars fell, a silvery streak shooting across the vast blue of the night. She wished quickly that Hans might come back safely and unashamed in his heart, and she thought of the moment when he had sunk on his knees and buried his head in her lap. Her doubts and fears departed.

She went back into the house and put wood into the stove. When the clock in the bedroom struck, she wondered about Aunt Minna's staying away so late. Then she blushed and looked embarrassedly into the mirror between the windows. She was wearing the delicate chain with the little heart, her aunt's wedding present which she was to have taken from the box only after she was married. She considered putting it back again, and for quite a while did not know what to do. Finally she decided to keep it on. To take it off would be to lie—to betray her love. Aunt Minna

herself had said there was no escape from one's heart. She would understand. . . .

Time dragged on. The bedroom clock struck again. Hans did not return nor did her aunt. Leni went outdoors and peered across the slope and down to the village, but there was no sign of them. The night was profound and motionless.

It was after she had returned to the kitchen that Leni stood still abruptly, listening. There was no sound, but something, she did not know what, gave her a strange feeling—as if someone were outside, though she had seen nothing there a moment ago.

She was about to upbraid herself for losing her nerve when there was a dull tapping on the kitchen window. The sudden sound pierced her through and through. Then all was silent once more. The next moment, very distinctly again . . . tap, tap . . . fingers on the window. She stepped toward it, hesitated, stood still as if paralyzed . . . tap . . . tap . . . it took all her courage to go forward and raise the curtain.

A face was pressed flat against the glass—two big eyes staring at her—a strange, frightening face, until she recognized it. These were the eyes that had looked so sad and so loving . . . this was the Czech boy who had walked hand in hand with the girl at the end of the row of prisoners from over the mountains the night before. It was he, and the girl, she had been told, who had escaped and been shot at last night.

Leni opened the door. The boy stumbled past her, at the end of his strength. Pressing his left hand upon the table he held himself upright to face her. His clothes were soiled and torn, his right hand crudely bandaged with a blood-soaked rag; and blood dripped from it to the floor.

"Help . . . Martitschka dying, help," the boy gasped in broken German, his voice flat with exhaustion. Then: "Where the circus? Tell them, Martitschka dying." His

voice faded out as he sank into a chair. His eyes fell shut and it seemed as if he were himself dying. His pale lips began to move once more, feebly: "Martitschka dying . . . dying . . . the circus . . . help . . ." And still the blood dripped.

The sight of it spurred Leni into action. She poured a glass of water and put it to the boy's lips. He gulped it down. His eyes opened. She rushed into the bedroom for a piece of linen, and removed the sodden bandage. It was a nasty wound; the hand from the wrist down to the thumb was ripped open to the bone. Leni tore a strip from the linen, made a tourniquet around the upper arm, as she had learned in the Hitler Youth. There was no antiseptic with which to wash the wound.

The boy became restless. "Help Martitschka," he begged. She bandaged his hand and threw the dirty, blood-soaked rag into the fire.

"We'll help her," she heard herself answer. "Where is she?"

The boy seemed not to understand.

She bent down to him. "Martitschka . . . where?"

"Forest . . . much rocks . . ."

"Is she wounded too?"

He stared at her.

"Martitschka . . . shot?" She pointed to the boy's bandage. "Wounded?"

He nodded. "Shot . . . fever . . . dying."

"She will not die," Leni heard herself say, as if she were certain of it.

There was some potato soup left on the stove. She poured it into a plate and broke off a piece of the bread that was so damp and gluey as to defy cutting. But when she turned around to give it to the boy he was on his feet and would not take a thing. "For Martitschka," he said with such decision that Leni did not even attempt to force the food on him.

"We'll take it along." She poured the soup into an empty milk can, then broke into it the last egg that was on the shelf. She put on her coat and took the linen under her arm and the blanket with which she had covered Hans the night before on the sofa. (He was drunk then; he was indifferent to the shooting on the slope—he was used to shooting.)

Only when they were out of the house, past the woodshed, and the cold air of the night made Leni button her coat, did she become fully aware of what she was doing. It occurred to her that she should have left a note, saying she would be back soon, but she dismissed the thought instantly, her heart pounding—so frightening was the suspicion that had seized her. Only the pitiful sight of the boy in front of her made her go on. He was dragging himself forward, stumbling and falling, the white bandage showing in the light of the stars.

"Hans must not know," Leni thought, and at the same time was ashamed of herself for holding him capable of betraying the fugitives. Yet in her ears rang his words of only two hours ago: "I am still what I have always been. I'll never change." And the night before her aunt had said: "Once a Nazi, always a Nazi."

Hiding in the shadow of the boulder that lay on the slope half-way between the house and the forest they paused when the noise of an automobile came from behind the ridge. It was an armored car. Its lights briefly picked the house out of the night, traveling past it quickly. As soon as the car disappeared into the ravine, the boy ran on and Leni followed him.

"Hans will ask me where I've been; he'll ask me," the thought hammered in her head. She must not tell him. That was the supreme rule—never to speak to anyone about underground work. No one. It would be criminal to tell Hans, especially after what he had said. But she could hear him persist, and see him getting angry when she refused to

answer. She would have to invent some harmless explanation for her absence . . . some plausible lie.

The boy motioned to her to follow more quickly. He hastened forward, finding new strength every time when he seemed exhausted and unable to go on. For a moment Leni was envious of the passion that drove him on, and wished she were that girl Martitschka and Hans this boy. How clear their consciences were, how clean their lives! Leni was struck by a terrible thought: Why was she afraid of Hans? She had him in her hand—he was a deserter and had to keep silent himself. She felt miserable for thinking this, but the bitterness of distrust had come into her heart again and ate away at the dreams like acid. And the faint hope that she might be back at the house before he returned gave her no consolation.

They reached the forest. Never stopping, the boy moved on in the darkness, rushing from tree to tree toward the old quarry. Arriving above it he turned left. Deep down at the bottom of the quarry stood the heavy cart for hauling stone that had been there ever since Leni could remember. It was broken now, one of the wheels lying at a distance from it. Leni could not resist making a brief pause; it was down there that her love for Hans had begun, so many years ago.

Abruptly the boy stopped and looked around, unsure of his way. Then he lay down to peer over the rim of the steep wall that shone white in the night. Leni began to fear for him, he lay so motionless, when suddenly he called out a few words in Czech. She understood only the girl's name, ". . . Martitschka . . . Martitschka . . ." It sounded so gay. And waving his bandaged hand the boy got to his feet and hurried on, so fast that she could barely keep up with him.

At the break in the rim where a trickle of water from the forest dripped down into the quarry the boy stopped and waited for her. Leni knew this spot. A narrow path led downward; they descended for a short distance until



they reached a small platform high above the bottom of the quarry. Proceeding carefully along the edge of the precipice they came to a niche in the towering rock. There, protected against observation from any direction, lay the girl.

The boy bent down beside her and talked rapidly. He stopped suddenly, then spoke again, lifting her head with both hands, kissing and caressing the face that gleamed white like the walls of the quarry.

The girl was dead. Leni felt for support against the rock. The boy's voice grew softer and softer and faded out completely. Slowly he laid the girl's head back on the ground; then he knelt motionless over her.

Leni saw the tears running down his cheeks fall on the girl's face. She saw the stars mirrored in the dark pool in which the girl was lying. She had bled to death. They had come too late.

Leni set down the milk can, the blanket, and the linen. Then she knelt beside the boy and hesitatingly put a hand on his shoulder. She heard herself say: "Martitschka has fallen, we have to fight on." Only afterwards did she realize that the boy did not know enough German to understand her.

He neither moved nor reacted in any way—as if he had not heard Leni and was not even aware of her presence. He stared at Martitschka's body and his tears ran down his face to dampen the dead one.

The first streaks of dawn began now to dilute the sky. Leni would have to hurry to cross the open slope before it grew light. The important thing was to help this boy and get him to safety—to communicate with the tall circus man. Now she knew what she had only guessed the night before—that the circus had had a hand in the escape of the two young people.

Leni bent down to the boy. "I'll go back now," she said.

"Stay here. I'll speak to the circus. We'll help you. Hide here. We'll come and help you."

The boy looked up. His tears stopped. He seemed older suddenly, maturer. "Martitschka dead," he muttered softly. "Martitschka dead." And after a pause, without raising his voice: "You kill her, you Germans. I not want help from you. German murderers. Go."

The hard expression that came into his face conveyed an icy decision. It was much more frightening than any outburst of hate could have been. Leni opened her lips, but no sound came from them. The boy's eyes stared at her, blank, unanswerable.

She fled. She did not know how she left the quarry. She stumbled through the forest, ran into rocks, tore her clothes, fell over roots. . . .

When Hans found her, guided by her voice that echoed from tree to tree in the foggy morning, she was on her knees, praying:

Lord have mercy upon us,  
Christ have mercy upon us,  
Lord have mercy upon us. . . .

She did not hear him calling nor see him coming. When he touched her arm, to lift her from the damp ground, she seemed not to feel it.

It started to rain as Hans brought Leni back to the house, half-carrying her across the slope, and put her to bed. She was shaking from head to foot and gave no answer to his repeated questions as to what had happened. She was praying continuously. The words, "Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us," flowed without pause from her pale lips, as monotonous as the dropping of the rain on the roof and windows, and equally wearing on his nerves.

Hoping that it would help her to overcome the shock she

must have suffered, Hans showed her the papers which permitted them to leave the village, and told her that they would be married that very day—that this was her wedding day. She looked at him for a long while, at first, as if he were a stranger, then, as if asking something with her eyes for which there were no words. And then she smiled in a way he had never seen before—so sweet and bitter, so happy and sad a smile it was, all in one. She closed her eyes and, still moving her lips in the monotonous prayer, fell asleep.

Closing the door silently he left the bedroom. In the kitchen he stood staring at the blood spots on the floor, pondering what it all meant. He had always hated riddles; they made him furious. But Leni's aunt would find out. She had gone on to follow the tracks after they had found Leni in the woods; she would find out. In the meantime he might as well get some sleep too. Exhausted he lay down on the sofa and was beyond all worry as soon as he had stretched out his legs. . . .

He did not know how long he had slept when he was awakened by someone pulling on his arm. It was Aunt Minna shaking him out of a dream in which Meissner had been arresting him. As he sat up, not knowing where he was, Leni came into the kitchen, in coat and hat, carrying her little yellow valise. On the table were three plates of hot soup.

"You must leave, the sooner the better," the aunt urged. "Have breakfast and be on your way."

Leni came over to Hans, kissed him shyly, and said softly: "Good morning." At first glance she seemed her old self again, but then he noticed the smile that had been on her lips before she fell asleep. And her eyes seemed to be looking at something far away.

They ate in silence. Hans listened to the rain until, after eating a few spoonfuls, he woke up completely and decided to ask some questions. But Aunt Minna was apparently awaiting that moment, for as he looked up resolutely from

his plate she said: "Don't ask. I won't answer. The sooner you leave, the better; and the less you know, the better too. But remember: when you came back from the village last night you found that Leni had gone to bed. And I was not here. You lay down on the sofa and went to sleep too. In the morning when you woke up I was here and gave you breakfast, the soup you are eating now. I gave you the soup and seemed to be anxious to get you both out of the house—as I really am. That's all you know, and that's all you say if the Gestapo should be interested."

Involuntarily Hans glanced at the kitchen floor; the blood spots were gone. "You are protecting Leni," he said. "That is very decent of you."

The soft falling rain, the spoons against the now empty plates, the aunt acting as if she had not heard what he said, Leni moving her lips in prayer—all made Hans feel an impulse to shout, to give orders; and a longing seized him to be far away at the front, behind a machine gun that knew neither doubt nor uncertainty. But he controlled himself, rose, and said matter-of-factly: "Then let's go, Leni."

The aunt advised them to go to the little town at the foot of the range, half-way between the village and Dresden. "Give the priest there my greetings, and he will marry you without making you wait," she said, and turned away, looking out of the window. Low clouds were scurrying across the slopes. The black rim of the Devil's Wood had disappeared behind them.

"Perhaps I'll join you in a few days," the aunt broke in, after a pause, with her back to them.

"My furlough is up in four days," Hans said.

"The Lord have mercy on us," Leni remarked aloud and smiled again, the queer smile. Hans began to be frightened by her.

Aunt Minna turned to them, enfolded Leni in her arms, and kissed her as if they were saying good-by forever. Then she did a strange thing. She pulled the necklace out from

under Leni's collar and kissed the little heart passionately. . . .

When Leni and Hans—he carrying the suitcase—came down the mountain road, they saw a cordon of soldiers swarm out from the village—a man every hundred feet, Hans judged—and advance up the slope toward the Devil's Wood. On the right flank of the line a civilian in a new raincoat—the yellow of the material cutting harshly through the soft gray of rain and fog—was leading two huge bloodhounds on long leashes.

The soldier who came up the road stopped Hans and Leni and took them before the officer commanding the widespread searching party, who was following his men at a distance, on a motorcycle. He was the same who at SS headquarters had signed Hans's and Leni's permits to leave the village. He wished them a happy wedding and let them pass.

Silently they walked on.

As soon as she was alone Aunt Minna sank into a chair. The time was past when she could miss a night's rest without feeling it. For a long while she sat motionless, fighting off her desire to sleep and reproaching herself for growing sentimental, when her mind turned to the little golden heart on the necklace which Leni had carried off. It seemed to Aunt Minna that her life had gone with it. How silly that was! For she had other things to think about. She must steel herself for what was coming. It was one thing to dedicate one's bit of life to a purpose, and another to really go through with it. The supreme test was still ahead of her, and she felt its approach in all her bones. She dared not fail.

The Czech boy, thank God, was safe. Following the tracks after she had left Leni with Hans, she had met one of the Czech partisan workers who were hiding in groups

in the forests and caves of the mountains, preferring to starve, or be hunted down and executed, to living in slavery under the 'Third Reich. The man had been sent to find out what had happened to the two young people, of whose escape they had received word, but who had not reached their hideout.

They found the boy in the quarry, sitting beside the dead girl and talking to her as if she were able to hear him. At first he paid no attention to his compatriot, but threw himself upon the girl, incessantly crying her name, "Martitschka, Martitschka," imploringly, as if calling her back to life. He fell silent and found his way back to reality only when the partisan shook him violently. He pushed back the strands of hair that had fallen over his face, his tears stopped, and his eyes grew hard. The aunt could not understand what the two said, but she saw the boy slowly shake his fist at the village below, whose swastika-crowned steeple and roofs swam vaguely in the foggy dawn.

After making the sign of the cross over the girl's heart, the boy left with the worker, looking back only once before leaving the quarry. Aunt Minna closed the dead girl's eyes and departed too, taking with her the milk can, the blanket, and the linen which Leni had left there. She hastened home, and before awakening Leni and Hans, washed the blood spots from the kitchen floor and threw dirt upon the stains outside the house. Now perhaps the rain was washing them away altogether. But she must not count on that. And she must hurry and send word to the friends that her house was no longer safe. . . .

She left for the estate earlier than usual. An SS man came out of the ravine just as she was taking the path. She gave a start, but he shouted a cheery "Good morning," and she waved a hand and walked on. Only after a while did she look back furtively. From where she stood, on a little knoll, she commanded the whole slope. The fog had partly lifted.

One glance revealed the widespread line of SS soldiers, and she moved on faster when she saw the yellow raincoat and the two dogs.

She had taken only a few steps when fierce barking broke out over the wide, rainy silence. Turning she saw that the dogs had found the scent, and a motorcycle came shooting over to the place. An officer jumped out, bent to the ground, and the dogs were released from their leashes. Aunt Minna's heart stood still as she watched the animals run back and forth, undecided which way to turn. Then, suddenly, they raced away toward the quarry, not toward the house. The officer blew a whistle and shouted commands, and the line of soldiers swung around, away from the house.

Aunt Minna hurried on. Perhaps her supreme test was not yet as close as she had feared in her weariness. There was at least a chance that the SS would miss that part of the track that led to the house and to her. There was still hope that once more she would escape detection—to live and fight on.

This hope was quickly shattered. When she arrived at the estate she was arrested. The Gestapo had come to the conclusion overnight that neither the escape of the Czech prisoners nor the scattering of the leaflets from the church tower could have been accomplished without local help. Meissner was not going to spoil the record of his one hundred per cent efficiency by half measures. During breakfast, which he took with the countess, he had ordered the arrest of the few men and women who had been left in the village when its population was transferred to war work in Dresden. When he learned that five Polish war prisoners working on a farm on the other side of the Eastern Woods had vanished, he extended his order to include every farmer in a wide circle around the village. He read the report, which was based on the answers of a frightened milkmaid, aloud to the countess. The farmer, after receiving word

that his third and last son had fallen on the Russian front, had set the prisoners free, giving them civilian clothes and all the money he had. After they had left he set fire to his farm and hanged himself in the barn.

"That is the spirit up here," Meissner said. "I shall break it."

"You can break the people, but not their spirit, I am afraid," the countess answered, and continued doing her lips with the harsh red lipstick she used. She was paler than usual this morning. Meissner liked the sharp contrast between white and red in her face. "One day you will say just one word too many," he said smilingly. He called his adjutant and ordered him to see that the countess was taken home safely. He himself intended to remain and clean up these mountains once and for all.

As the servants from the estate were marched to SS headquarters in the village, the aunt saw the yellow raincoat, the dogs, and the group of SS men move from the rim of the Devil's Wood toward her house. After all they had not missed that part of the track that led to it. . . .

The town to which Leni and Hans went on the advice of the aunt was a little spa with springs that allegedly cured rheumatism; with baths, neat inns, many small eating places, two movie houses, a summer theater, and—the pride of the town—a huge hotel in the forested hills, constructed like a castle, with turrets and ramparts, and many pleasant promenades built on the initiative of the local chamber of commerce.

In peacetime middle-class people from Dresden, Leipzig, and even Berlin spent their vacations at this delightful place, which was in easy reach. At a modest price it offered its visitors both the satisfaction of improving their health and of indulging in luxury. With the years the town had become a playground for families whose fathers commuted daily, or at least visited over the week-ends.



During the summer the people of the mountain village would watch the fireworks which were displayed at the artificial lake of the hotel almost every Sunday evening. Recalling the sparkling stars that used to shoot so high into the night skies to explode into a fountain of lights, Hans, walking with Leni past the church to the priest's house, suddenly said: "No fireworks." What he meant was that everything here too had changed.

All the eating places, stores, and gift shops were closed. The sidewalks, the streets, the little parks were neglected. No music was playing. The general deterioration seemed greater than in Dresden, perhaps because this little town had always tried to look like a young girl going to a dance.

Even more conspicuous was the change from the care-free vacationists, beaming shopkeepers, and propertied citizens who once enlivened the streets, to the population now visible to Hans and Leni. It was about noon. Old folk and children, many of them bandaged or on crutches, in torn clothes, freezing in the rain, were standing everywhere in queues, pots of every description in their hands, waiting to receive their rations from field kitchens. They did not speak, did not look to right or left, and moved forward slowly—the shuffling of their feet accentuating the strange silence that seemed to have settled over the whole place. At the entrance to the *Hotel zum Deutschen Adler* hung a large banner that read: "Evacuée Relief. District Headquarters."

After Hans had knocked several times, a little old man opened the locked door of the priest's house. He was so shrunk and aged that Leni and Hans did not recognize him although they had known him as children, when he had been the sacristan at their village church. He remembered Hans as soon as he heard his name. "The teacher's son," he said, and Hans had the uncomfortable feeling that things long past and forgotten were going through the old

man's mind. He told them that his reverence was not at home. When they explained why they had come, he admitted them and had them wait on the bench in the hall. For a moment it seemed as if he wanted to ask something, but he said nothing and disappeared.

There they sat, Leni holding Hans's hand, her eyes fixed upon the crucifix above the door, he listening to the old clock that was ticking his precious time away. Four more days and he would be on his way back to the Russian front. In contradiction to what he had said the day before, he now had the feeling that he would never again return from there. Four more days to live, and he was losing time waiting for a priest. And what for? To marry a girl who was his anyway, and did not promise much, the state she was in.

"I won't ask you any questions, Leni," he said. "But you've got to take hold of yourself. In four days I'll be gone."

She pressed his hand. "A day or a year," she began but did not continue. Her eyes again had that far-away, spectral look they had had in the forest.

"Yes, Leni," he said patiently, surprised by his own tenderness.

"Words can't express it, Hans."

"What?"

Strained furrows appeared on her brow.

"Just say it, Leni," he urged. "Just say what you are thinking."

"I feel as if there were no days and no years . . . as if time did not exist at all."

He knew that feeling. He had often experienced it at the front, when the endless monotony of war obliterated past and future and time seemed to stand still.

"We have always said: better one great moment than a long, dreary life," he answered.

"No, Hans, no," she whispered, horrified. "I don't mean

it that way. I mean that nothing matters except doing the right thing. If we have a good conscience then it makes no difference whether we live a day, a year, or——”

She fell silent when she saw his face harden. For a moment it had been open, like a window; now the shutters were closed tight again.

“Don’t be angry with me,” she begged.

As he looked down at her upturned face he suddenly knew of what her expression reminded him. All morning he had been plagued by a vague remembrance which he could not place. Now he knew. The same expression had tormented him in that Belgian chapel in whose ruins he had mounted his machine gun. The same haunting smile had beamed down on him from the torn altar painting. They had beaten back an English counterattack that day and had received their meals on time for once, but he had felt jittery and thought himself sick, till he found out that he was troubled by that face which was compelling him to look at it over and over again. Only after he had pulled the painting down and stamped it into the dust had he found peace. But now, not knowing what came over him, he bent forward and gently kissed that smile on Leni’s face. . . .

The clock in the hall struck one and almost simultaneously steps approached and a key was turned in the door. They stood up as the priest entered. At once Hans saw the soldier in the man. His movements were brisk and precise, his bearing straight. He could not have been more than thirty-five.

The old sacristan came rushing through the hall to explain who the visitors were and what they wanted. The priest asked whether he knew them personally. Giving an affirmative answer, the sacristan again called Hans “the teacher’s son,” but it sounded now like a commendation.

Leni took a step forward, said, “Glory to Christ,” and conveyed her aunt’s compliments. When the priest heard

the aunt's name he looked sharply and suspiciously at Hans, then back at Leni and again at Hans, who quickly explained that they would have been married the day before if the priest of the village had not died suddenly.

"Yes, I know," said the priest, cutting him short. "Then let us proceed. Misfortune often strikes twice." To the sacristan he gave a few orders and went upstairs. Hans noticed the artificial leg, which gave him trouble in mounting the stairs, and thought that he must have been an army chaplain. He hated army chaplains and he did not like the tone which the priest had used.

The sacristan led Hans and Leni into a room filled with books. One wall was covered by a large painting of the Resurrection. Their names and dates of birth were written into the matricula, and the wedding certificates prepared. Leni opened her suitcase and took out her wedding dress, asking where she might change for the ceremony. Before the surprised sacristan could say a word, the priest entered. He said firmly: "You cannot change here. And if it were not for your aunt, I would not marry you at all now. I am in a great hurry." He was still wearing his overcoat.

"But, my mother always wanted, . . ." stammered Leni, and tears sprang to her eyes.

"Sorry."

The priest stepped in front of the painting, opened a small volume bound in black leather, and beckoned them closer.

Leni looked to Hans for help.

"His Reverence is doing us a favor," Hans said coldly and took her by the hand. She followed him, pressing the faded dress to her heart.

The priest read a short prayer, then asked each of them the fateful question. And, hastened by his haste, each answered rapidly, "I do." Whereupon they were pronounced man and wife, the priest adding without a pause: "I hope

you will live as Christians and bring up your children as true Christians." Then he signed the certificates and was out of the room and out of the house. The sacristan, chalk white and trembling, handed them the certificates, saying: "You had better leave too."

"Pack your dress; we are married," Hans said sarcastically, but when he saw the expression on Leni's face, he took her into his arms and kissed her and said softly: "We are married, Leni. Try to be happy."

She attempted a smile but tears interrupted the feeble effort and washed it away.

At the end of two hours Hans and Leni had learned that there was not a single room left in the town, which was overcrowded with évacués from Hamburg. They filled every house, hotel, school, dance hall, and theater. Never in its history had the place sheltered so many visitors, but neither the property owners nor the shopkeepers—the few who were still in business—were beaming in the streets. There was only one thing for Hans and Leni to do—to try to reach Dresden and find a room there. They walked to the railway station. It was still raining, and they both felt the lack of sleep.

The station seemed to be the only empty place in town, for the reason that the next train was not due to leave until evening. That meant hours of waiting. They bought tickets and sat down on one of the long wooden benches. "We had better get some sleep," Hans remarked, and the moment Leni had put her head against his shoulder her eyes fell shut. But he had to wake her again. "Where is your travel permit?" he asked. She brought it out of the straw suitcase, from under the wedding dress. "If a patrol should come, I may have to show my furlough paper," he continued. "Don't be surprised by the difference in my name."

"I won't," she assured him.

"If they ask questions, we just met in town."

"We just met," she whispered, pressing close to him, and fell asleep again.

He dozed off into a half-sleep, as at the front when an attack was expected. Four days more and he would be on his way back to the front and out of danger. He wished he were already that far. When the enemy attacked one had no choice and no doubts. It was a clear-cut proposition—kill or be killed. . . .

When Hans woke up, a few more people were in the station and a sailor was sitting beside him. Leni was still sound asleep, and he did not dare to move though he tried to catch the aroma from the sailor's cigarette. Since the day before he had not smoked. He had tried to buy cigarettes while they were looking for a room, but had met only surprise at his naïve expectation.

"Have a puff," said the sailor. He was a strongly built man about Hans's age, but his hand shook as he handed him the cigarette.

"Thanks, I will."

As Hans handed the cigarette back, the sailor said: "Keep it."

"Thanks, comrade."

"You are a front soldier, not one of those——" The sailor did not finish.

"Russian front," said Hans. "Furlough's up in four days."

"Mine's tomorrow." And after a pause the sailor added: "Nice girl you have."

"Just met her."

"Mine is dead."

The sailor lighted another cigarette, took a long puff and went on: "She was killed in Hamburg. My sister too. Kind of a surprise when I got home. No Hamburg there at all any more. No houses, only ruins and dust. No people, all corpses. I was told my parents had been evacuated to this damned town. First I had to fight for a week to get permission to follow them. Now I've been searching for

them for three days and nights and haven't found them." The sailor's voice was as shaky as his hand—shaky and hoarse.

"They might be in some other place."

"They might."

After another pause, the sailor asked with sudden aggressiveness: "How far will you go on retreating in Russia?"

"Till the front is shortened enough and the divisions needed to beat the English and Americans can be transferred to the west."

The sailor laughed a bitter laugh. "If there is still something left of Germany by then," he whispered. "You should see Hamburg."

"Shut up!" snapped Hans. He felt like knocking the sailor down, but he could not afford to get into trouble. "Listen," he said, "it's hard for everyone, not only for you. My mother is over sixty and has to kill herself in an ammunition factory. That's how it is. But the war is not yet over. If we cracked up now we'd be destroyed, you and me, every one of us. At best we'd be sold as slaves. And nothing would be left of Germany, either. If we keep our nerve we'll keep our lives, and more. The Americans will begin to sing a different tune when we hold our fortress while they can do nothing but count their dead, hundreds of thousands of them. That will be the time to think of peace, not before."

"You talk like a Nazi," said the sailor.

"I am a Nazi," Hans answered.

They did not speak another word. The sailor stared at the dated time-tables over which red-bordered posters had been plastered, announcing the execution of three men and two women for listening to foreign broadcasts, spreading defeatist rumors, and helping foreigners. Hans tried to suppress a voice within that mocked him for talking so big

and saying things of which he was not so certain any more. . . .

When the train was announced the sailor got up. He stared at the people rushing outside and then watched Hans awakening Leni with an expression of curiosity. Suddenly he said: "I won't leave; I'll look around once more. I have to find them." Instead of going out to the train that was thundering into the station, he left for the town.

When they came out on the platform Hans saw the priest again. Two SS men had seized him as he tried to enter a car, and dragged him off. People looked the other way. Leni did not see the incident. She was still numbed by her sleep, by her dreams—of her aunt, of the circus children, of the Czech children in the quarry. The words of the Czech boy rang in her ears again: "Murderers, German murderers." And a deep hopelessness overcame her. Fighting against it with all her power she thought: "I am married now. I have to be a good wife. I have to bring up children, bring them up as true Christians."

Hans wondered what her faint smile meant as they were pushed from side to side in the overcrowded train. He could not know that she was wishing her first child to be a girl, so that she could name it "Martitschka."



# XI

THE railway journey from the foothills of the mountain range to Dresden normally took about forty minutes. It would not have taken much longer when Hans and Leni, on the evening of their wedding day, returned to the city, except that the train halted for over two hours just outside the main station. This exasperating wait was borne with seeming apathy by everyone in the cold, badly lighted, and overcrowded cars, even by those passengers who had found no seats and were compelled to stand in the corridors.

Not a word of complaint could be heard. If a sign or an involuntary expression of irritation revealed someone's growing impatience, such loss of self-control was hastily atoned for by patriotic remarks: "If the English and Americans think they can bomb us into submission, they will learn differently," or, "The Russians will break their heads on the East-wall." At the same time the speaker would glance furtively from face to face to note whether his impatience might have been taken as a criticism of the government.

The Gestapo was everywhere again. Its agents even masqueraded as Jews, wearing the yellow star of David on their coats to win confidence. With measures that had stiffened at every success of the enemy, the SS had been put on a new and more rigid war footing against the so-called "enemy within." It had become a mortal danger to show signs of displeasure. Incautious people, or "weaklings" unable to control their nerves, simply disappeared without leaving a trace. Even their nearest relatives were no longer informed of what happened to them. In former times, in the first years of the Third Reich, a waiting father or worrying mother

was at least notified of the death of the son who had incurred the wrath of the Nazis—the mail delivering a package containing a few handfuls of ashes. Such sentimental formalities were dispensed with now. But to serve as a reminder, without revealing the extent of the terror that had become necessary to keep the country in line, the fate of a few of the many who constantly vanished all over the Reich was made known daily. This fate was always the same: execution by the ax, for treason. "Heads will roll," had been a famous phrase of the Fuehrer long before he had come to power. No one had taken it seriously at the time. But he was keeping his promise now, by day and by night.

Hans placed an arm around Leni, supporting her. She had buried her head on his shoulder and seemed asleep, but from time to time she looked up, smiling wearily, and edged closer to him as if finding safety in his nearness. This evoked a sense of worthiness in him—almost a feeling of achievement—that seemed to derive from who he was and not from what he did. In the war and with the party only deeds counted.

He bent down and whispered in her ear: "We are married, Leni. You are my wife."

She looked up. "Yes, Hans," she answered softly, barely moving her lips. But her tired eyes opened wide.

Although pressed in between so many people who smelt of bad food and lack of soap, Hans and Leni felt as if they were all alone. To him it seemed that something strange was happening. He did not know what it was, but it reminded him of a sensation he had sometimes experienced in his youth, when a boyish dream had appeared to come within his grasp. But he was not dreaming now. He was holding Leni in his arms, and she was his in spite of everything that had stood between them. She and he: that was it! She and he. He was not alone any longer, that was the new thing. He had never thought of it that way, that he

would not be alone any longer. He realized only now how lonely he had been all his life.

It was still raining. Wind and water lashed against the train. From a broken window came a cold wet draught and the passengers ducked their heads like a flock of birds. When the swinging light of a trainman passed outside, or a whistle shrieked, they stretched their necks for a moment in the hope that the train would at last move on. Then an SS man shouted into the car that all hotel rooms in Dresden had been requisitioned by the government, and that only people on official business or those living in Dresden would be permitted to leave the train on its arrival. All other passengers must remain in the cars.

No reason was given for the order, but everyone guessed it: the évacués arriving from the north and west were taxing the facilities of Dresden to the utmost. Why they were not moved farther south, or more rapidly distributed over the countryside—as well as many other “whys”—were asked in silence. The unhappy passengers who were to remain in the train instantly began to make sure of the seats of those who were to depart. In the ensuing quarrels some of the hidden bad temper found a limited outlet.

Hans did not like the idea of being checked on when the train arrived. The closer the end of his stolen furlough approached, the more he dreaded using his dead comrade's paper. Then the problem of finding a place to stay began to occupy him. They had left the little town because there had been no room for them. Now it was the same story again, and they were more weary than ever. He thought ruefully what a fine wedding this was, yet he was not angry. The general misery removed the sting from his own.

Leni looked up. In her eyes was the same question that troubled him. But before he could utter a comforting word, the same unearthly smile that he had seen that very dawn in the forest appeared on her face again and seemed to make everything else unimportant.

"I'll find a place, don't worry," he said with assurance and she buried her head again on his shoulder.

It did him good to see that she had confidence in him. But he had no idea where he would find the promised place. Of course, Leni could always return to the barrack room and he could sleep on the floor at his sister's. But no, he would have to find a room, even if he had to kill someone. Not only a room but a really nice one, where they could be together for the three nights and days that still remained of the furlough—a room where they would be left in peace. Three nights and days of peace—that was not asking too much.

At long last the train moved into the station. The doors of the cars were kept shut, with the exception of one at the end of the train where SS men checked on the passengers who wished to be admitted to the city. Leni and Hans were passed without any difficulty; many others, especially from among those who said they were traveling on official business, were brusquely rejected. A party boss from one of the mountain villages fumed and protested, and his incredulous face when the SS shoved him back into the train evoked scornful laughter.

The station was filled with *évacués*. In long rows they stood, four abreast on the six parallel platforms of the wide hall—thousands of them, children, women, old men, cripples. They were dressed like people fleeing from a burning house at night. They were dirty, many of them bandaged, and a frightening stupor on their hungry and haggard faces obliterated their individual features. They all looked terrifyingly alike.

As Leni and Hans walked past them to the exit gate a child began to cry at one side of the hall. On the other side a woman screamed hysterically, but her unnerving cries were drowned out by the thundering noise of a train entering the station. Elsewhere wails of horror arose, and

echoed from the blacked-out glass roof. As the train stopped with shrieking brakes, the row of évacués next to it suddenly became a disorderly howling mass shrinking away from the train: someone had thrown himself in its path, and now lay beneath a car, crushed and screaming.

Hans hurried Leni past the horrible scene, through the gate, and into the "Restaurant for I and II Class Passengers"—a sign which no longer meant much, food being served neither here nor in the "Restaurant for III Class Passengers." The place was cold and dark but almost empty.

"Sit down, Leni," Hans said, putting down the yellow valise. And after she had quieted down a little he continued: "I'll look for something to eat and drink."

"Don't leave me; I couldn't eat now," she pleaded.

"I'll be back in no time. Don't go away."

They had to eat, and he had to find out where he could get a place to stay. He went to the soldiers' canteen, which functioned as usual. He had only to show his furlough pass to be served, but it was not permitted to bring a woman into the place. Concerning quarters he was advised to go to the "Soldiers' Welcome Station" on the lower floor.

Hans gulped down the dreary cabbage soup, saving the two pieces of meat that swam in it. He put them on a piece of bread and took it to Leni. She was seated at the large round table, resting her head on both hands, her eyes closed. She opened them only when he touched her.

"Here, you must eat," he said.

She shrank from the food, but when he urged her repeatedly, as gently as he could, she seized and ate it hungrily. Hans had seen that often at the front—the mind gave up but the body went on. He himself had even vomited one moment in disgust and cowardice, and yet eaten with appetite the next.

He left her again and went downstairs to the "Welcome Station." They had quarters for single soldiers only, in an armory, but sent him to the Red Cross. There everyone

was busy with the évacués and he was directed to another office, located in a building opposite the station.

A nasty wind swept the rain across the dark, deserted square. They could not leave the station in this weather without knowing where to go. "I've got to get a room even if I have to kill someone," he thought, but when he arrived at the office it was closed.

Hans was not one to give up easily, but at this moment he knew despair and frustration. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He had said to Leni: "I'll find a place," and she had counted on him. He wanted to keep his word, and there he stood—helpless. Often in his life he had overcome difficulties where failure would have meant death, but now in the matter of getting a room, a simple room, he was to fail. There in the darkness all about him was a town with thousands and thousands of rooms but none for him. . . .

In his pocket he still had the address of the place where he had spent two nights before following Leni to the mountain village. If he paid them well enough the girls there might let him sleep with Leni for a night in one of their rooms. Hans dismissed the thought that the house was no proper place for a bride—this was no time for squeamish notions of that sort. But the house was a long way from the station, and if they refused to let him in with Leni, what then?

He went back to the station and into a telephone booth. He looked up the number of the alderman, the monkey-like uncle of the piano-playing girl, in whose house he had had dinner the day his father threw him out. Hans remembered the man's saying something to the effect that he was on a housing commission when, during the evening, a telephone call had summoned him to a meeting about arrangements for évacué quarters. It was a long shot, but as Hans put in the call, he had the sudden feeling that he was to get what he wanted.

The alderman was not at home, said his wife—that slut!

—who answered the call. Hans recognized her voice and she remembered him instantly when he started to explain who he was—“That handsome sergeant”—and then listened to his troubles. There was a short silence after he had finished; then she asked: “For how long did you say you want the room?”

“For three nights and three days.”

“How can I be sure that you’ll leave then?”

“I told you that my furlough is over in three days.”

“And you are really married to this girl?”

“I can show you our marriage certificate. We were married today. This is our wedding night and we are out in the street.”

There was another pause, then the woman said with a sigh that sounded like a burst of wind in the telephone: “I haven’t the heart to say no. You can come to us. I will have a room ready for you and your wife.”

Rushing upstairs and toward the entrance of the restaurant Hans felt as if he had won a battle single-handed. He had a room; he had kept his word. And he was almost sorry for thinking of the Frau Alderman as a slut.

He was held up by a column of évacués filing slowly into the restaurant. As he waited impatiently their misery brought back to him all the misery he had seen since he had come home. But his enthusiasm was checked for only a moment. He was no fool. He was not going to let other people’s misfortunes affect him. He had three days and nights, and nothing and no one were going to spoil them for him. . . .

Leni was not at the table where he had left her. She had risen and retreated toward the empty buffet counter. Holding herself upright against an iron pole to which a garland of dusty paper flowers was fastened, she was gazing at the évacués who moved silently save for the tired shuffling of their feet and the scraping of chairs into which they fell exhaustedly. Leni stared at them, her pale, drawn face show-

ing neither her emotion nor thought. It was frighteningly death-like. Hans came in time to rescue her from the attention of a Red Cross woman who started speaking to her as if to someone insane.

"I have a room, Leni," Hans said and took her arm.

She seemed not even to notice that he had spoken. Her lips praying silently, as before, her rapt glance passed him and surveyed the misery that settled down at the many tables of the large room. But she went with him willingly as he picked up her suitcase and then led her out of the restaurant and down the stairs to the street level.

When Hans woke the next day he heard piano-playing that sounded like dark bells ringing. There stood a piano not far from him, huge, black, shining, but no one was playing. On the contrary, a deep quietness was all around him. On a little table beside the couch was a tray with a cup of steaming coffee and a piece of bread.

Slowly Hans realized that he was in the barren, white-washed attic room in the alderman's house. The black curtains that had been closely drawn at their arrival late the night before were pulled apart. They reminded him again of funeral buntings as on that evening a week ago when he had been in this room for the first time. The window panes that cut into the slanting ceiling were blind with rain. And it was so still that he could hear the drizzle on the roof.

He sat up. Beside him the bed was empty. He remembered Leni's terrible desolateness the night before: he had feared she was going to be ill. They had both been wet to the skin when they had finally reached the house.

"Good morning, Hans."

He turned. Leni had spoken from the other side of the long room and now came quickly toward him. She was fully dressed, her hair was neatly combed, and she seemed entirely recovered from the hardships of the previous day. She



looked lovely as she hesitated, blushed, and sat down beside him.

"I got the alderman to give me a cigarette for you," she said, putting it and an ashtray on the little table.

"Good morning, Leni."

"It is after twelve; dinner is at one. The Frau Alderman has invited us to eat with them. She asked us to be punctual."

"Good morning, Leni."

He stretched out his arms for her and drew her close and kissed her.

"Do you still remember what I said to you before we fell asleep?" he asked.

"That I should sleep well and forget everything but our love."

"And what else?"

"That the world and the war are so much stronger than we."

"And what else?"

"That we shall live these two days we have as if there were no war, and neither look back nor ahead."

She repeated his words like a schoolgirl saying her lesson. She attempted a smile that did not quite come off and was contradicted by the seriousness in her eyes. He pretended not to notice it.

"And that's what we shall do," he said. "Breakfast in bed, and even a cigarette; it's wonderful." He really meant this. He could not remember when he had ever had breakfast in bed, perhaps once as a boy when sick, and it touched him deeply that Leni should have found him a cigarette. That she had thought of it!

"There is no hot water, but you can use the bath room on the second floor," Leni said when he got up, handing him the piece of soap which he had given her as a present. After using it herself that morning she had wrapped it again in the yellow paper with the violets on it.

"You think of everything—and I was always so afraid of getting married," he said, and, putting on his coat, he slipped barefooted out of the room.

She opened a window and placed the bedclothes on two chairs in front of it to air. She dusted the room with the rag she had got in the kitchen, though the Frau Alderman had said the Polish maid would put the room in order.

"Not to look back and not to look ahead—if that were possible," Leni thought, and wondered whether Hans only talked that way or whether he was really able to forget so much, or at least to ignore what he did not want to know. She knew that she could not. Through the whole morning, ever since she had opened her eyes, she had been thinking of the Czech boy and of his girl Martitschka who lay dead in the quarry. "You kill her, you Germans," the boy had said. "I not want help from you. German murderers." The words had not yet stopped ringing in her ears.

And she feared for her aunt. If the SS found out that the boy had been at the house? And the circus people? When she and Hans had walked through the village the morning before she had seen the two circus children, the woman, and the old clown come out of SS headquarters, but the tall circus man had not been with them. What if the SS and the Gestapo had found out? In the end they always did. Then they would soon catch up with her too. Of that she was very much afraid, yet at the same time not afraid at all. It would mean her end. But was not the end better than this life?

Deep within her Leni was ashamed of having such a thought. She had to be a good wife to Hans. He had only two days; then he would have to go back to the Russian front. She had to be a good wife, a good wife for two days. She suppressed the tears that wanted to fill her eyes and forced herself to smile. Just then Hans returned.

"I had a cold shower," he said. "Brr—but I feel wonderful." Then he saw her smile and rushed over and embraced her.

"Yes, Leni, smile. Smile, Leni," he said and pressed her close.

Punctually at one o'clock seven people took their seats at the dinner table. Hans's place was between Leni and Gudrun, the pale and whining daughter of the house whom he remembered only too well. Opposite him sat a middle-aged couple, a Herr and Frau *Obersturmbannfuehrer*. He was a tall and large man in a too tightly fitting uniform, moon-faced, reddish-blond, with a military haircut. His wife seemed even taller than he, but was thin, sharp-nosed, and bitter, the silent martyr in an unhappy marriage. At the far end sat the Frau Alderman wearing a red evening dress that left her rosy, fat arms bare. ("We are going to the opera afterwards," she explained.) From the other end of the table the Herr Alderman smiled subserviently at the Herr *Obersturmbannfuehrer*.

The room was furnished with heavy oak pieces and two oilprints in ornate gold frames. The large bay window was curtained with white lace and with draperies of blue velvet that bulged down in symmetrical folds held in place by silvery cords. Two artificial palm trees—dated symbols of the Nordic longing for the sun—filled the dark corners next to the rainswept window.

At a sharp command from his wife the Alderman leapt up and switched on the light. The fixture hung half-way over the table, a fringe of green glass beads adorning its shade. The lamp did not illuminate the room but was reflected in the Dutch porcelain, the Belgian silver, the Italian damask tablecloth, and in the bottles of French wine which suggested girls drawn up in a row—so slender they were, so coquettish with their red caps. The light was not flattering. It produced dark rings under everyone's eyes and long shadows under their noses.

The smell of the soup served by the Polish maid mingled with the scent of lavender that emanated from the

tablecloth. "Cabbage soup again," thought Hans while patting Leni's hand. She smiled at him, but seemed ill at ease. When her glance fell on the Polish maid the smile vanished and she pressed Hans's arm, holding onto him as if frightened.

There was little general conversation during the meal which, to Hans's pleasant surprise, consisted of a goose, after the ominous cabbage soup, and a homemade cake with custard sauce. Most of the talk came from the hostess, the Frau Alderman. She held a monologue, veering from subject to subject without apparent transitions. She spoke of her last visit to Prague, of the efficiency of the women's fire-fighting brigade under her command, of the duty to enjoy life in order to dissipate the contagious gloom of the defeatists, and of the arrogance of the évacués who thought that they owned everything because they had lost everything. Only the *Obersturmbannführer* seemed really to be listening. From time to time he and the Frau Alderman laughed simultaneously, and as they looked at each other their laughter sounded as if they were alone, and indecent.

Gudrun ate, her father ate, the Frau *Obersturmbannführer* ate, all three ate with intensity but, so it seemed, with little enjoyment. Hans found that he could not eat as much as he had thought when the golden-cruled goose was brought in, and his appetite was not encouraged by Leni's behavior. He had to urge her to get her to eat anything at all. She seemed to have forgotten where she was. Lost in thought, she moved her lips silently. Thank God, only he knew that she was praying. But the others sensed that something was not quite right and exchanged furtive glances. "You are very fortunate, Frau Alderman," said the Frau *Obersturmbannführer* abruptly. "You are fortunate that your attic is occupied just now. I had to register an empty room today. Who knows what kind of people will be quartered with us."

"You should never have had an empty room to start with, my dear," answered the Frau Alderman.

Hans was too concerned with Leni, trying to attract her attention, casting admonishing looks at her, to notice the anger which, in contrast to the deliberate sweetness of her voice, had sharpened his hostess's face. But he caught the implication of the Frau *Obersturmbannfuehrer's* remark. So that was why the Frau Alderman hadn't had the heart to say no to him when he begged her for a room—she had wanted to avoid having évacués quartered on her. It would have been a pleasure to tell her what he thought of her, and Leni would have liked it, but it was the part of discretion to keep the room and the food and drink that went with it.

As Hans looked around, after Leni had got herself under control, he saw the *Obersturmbannfuehrer* squeeze his wife's left wrist with such pressure that her face twisted in pain. Gudrun was watching the scene with cruel interest, while a triumphant smile played around her mother's lips. The alderman looked suspiciously from face to face. To relieve the sudden tenseness that seemed to oppress the air he knocked with his knife against his glass and rose to his feet.

He began by explaining the elaborateness of the meal by its being a wedding dinner for an old party member and front soldier and his lovely bride, a war worker. He paused, looked at his wife, and only after she had nodded approvingly did he continue, laying on the slick pathos of the professional speaker. His snarling voice sounded as if it came from one of the records that were forever being played on the radio.

"In these times," he said, "in these great and trying times, when thousands of German heroes give their lives daily in defense of Germany and Europe, and millions of German women forge the weapons these heroes need, we have to think not only of the immediate future, not only about our

victory, which is assured if we follow the Fuehrer through thick and thin. We have to think also of more distant times when the Third Reich will need strong forces to exploit its victory. Only a German Europe will be a happy Europe. If we produce weapons today for the war of today—at the same time we have to produce children for the tasks of tomorrow. They will be the weapons of our future. Through them the German nation will rule the conquered world. Therefore it is the iron command of the Fuehrer: we must remain the most numerous nation of Europe, we must become overwhelmingly stronger than all the other European peoples combined. We can achieve this goal in two ways. First through the relentless liquidation of our enemies, eradicating their manhood, making it impossible for their women to bear children. And the second way: by producing more and more Germans.”

The alderman paused for a moment and then closed: “I drink to our bridegroom and his lovely bride. May his strength and her golden bloneness be inherited by their children and children’s children.”

“*Sieg heil, Sieg heil, Sieg heil,*” shouted the sweating *Obersturmbannfuehrer*, and everyone rose with him and the wine glasses clinked. Hans was afraid of what Leni might do. To his astonishment she was quite composed and smiled upon everyone. But when her glass touched his, he saw in her eyes a fire that boded trouble.

“On my wedding day I was as excited as you are now,” said the Frau *Obersturmbannfuehrer* to Leni after they had all sat down again, and then she added, staring into space: “It is only a few years since that day—but how much longer it seems. . . .”

Her husband looked irritably at her and seized her wrist a second time; around the lips of the Frau Alderman that same triumphant smile played as she watched him.

“She is a slut,” thought Hans. The wine was going to his head. The surroundings became hazy, everything except

the oak cupboard; it looked like a tank moving toward him out of the fog. He heard Gudrun whisper to Leni: "As soon as you get pregnant you'll be freed from factory work. I would like to get pregnant but I can't."

"Where is Fräulein Louise who lived in the attic room?" Hans asked against his will. "She was an artist. She was so afraid her hands might be ruined in a factory—where is she?"

Again there was a moment of painful silence. Then the Herr *Obersturmbannführer* reached past his wife and slapped the alderman (who pretended not to have heard Hans's question) on the shoulder, shouting, "You had no luck with her!" and he laughed and poured himself another glass of wine and drank it down.

"Louise is making ammunition, as she should," said the Frau Alderman, and rose. "We'll take the coffee in the living room."

Everyone followed her example—the Frau *Obersturmbannführer* staring into space, her husband taking a bottle of wine and his glass along, Gudrun yawning, the Herr Alderman biting his lips. Leni watched the Polish maid who came in to remove the dishes.

Hans took Leni's arm and whispered: "Hold out! We'll soon be alone."

Though Hans and Leni would have liked to be left alone, the Frau Alderman forced them into her theater party—it was the alderman's turn that day to use the city administration's opera box. The performance—*Carmen*—began in the middle of the afternoon because, as an air-raid precaution, theaters and movie houses had to be closed by nightfall. Once Leni and Hans had entered the magnificent building of the Dresden opera they enjoyed being there. Neither had been to an opera for years and they had never sat in a box. The festive air of expectancy elated

them. When the lights went down and the orchestra began the overture each reached excitedly for the other's hand.

The program informed them that Friedrich Nietzsche, the "first National-Socialist philosopher" had praised *Carmen* as a masterpiece. It did not tell them that Nietzsche held this Spanish opera by a French composer to be far above the entire *œuvre* of Richard Wagner, the noisy inspirer of the Fuehrer. But they experienced the true greatness of *Carmen* without knowing this. Music and story removed their minds completely from their everyday existence into a world unknown to them, where passionate love, not the state and its orders, seemed the center of life. And without quite understanding what was happening to them, they breathed the air of such a human world as escaped prisoners do the air of freedom.

In the second intermission however they were reminded of reality. A contingent of Spanish fascists filed into the theater and took seats which had been cleared for them in the front rows. They wore the uniform of the Spanish Blue Division, which Generalissimo Franco had put at the disposal of his friend Adolf Hitler. An SS officer came from behind the curtain, stepped forward to the footlights, and welcomed them as men who had overthrown the Spanish Republic just as the Nazi stormtroopers had overthrown the Weimar Republic. He hailed them as allies who were on their way to the Russian front to fight for a new, free Europe beside their German comrades. The audience applauded and cheered, and then stood silent while the Spanish anthem was played. It was followed by the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, sung by the whole house.

Leni sang too, though she hated every word and every note of the song. Wonderingly she watched Hans singing with the gusto of a pre-war stormtrooper. He was quite obviously enjoying himself. Then her eyes wandered through the audience. The fanatical frenzy which the song had pro-



duced in former times was absent. Most of the spectators sang, as she herself did, because they knew themselves watched by the invisible Gestapo.

After the performance the Frau Alderman wanted to take Hans and Leni to a party meeting but they resisted successfully, Hans declaring that he had promised the evening to his parents.

"It really would be nice to visit them," said Leni as soon as they were alone.

"Tomorrow will do," answered Hans. "I want to be alone with you, Leni. How did you like that girl Carmen? She really had fire."

Leni tried once more to persuade him to make the visit; she was sure his mother would be very happy to learn about their marriage. But Hans was right in his refusal; his parents lived at the other end of town, it was still raining, and every tram stop was beleaguered by people trying to get into the few overcrowded cars.

They walked quickly back to the alderman's house, which was not far from the opera. Gudrun received them. She seemed a different person with her mother away. She had sent the Polish maid to bed—"Mother works her to death, yet where will she get another one as good?"—and prepared supper for the three of them in the kitchen.

During the meal she suddenly began to laugh. "How did you like Father's speech?" she asked. "The joke is he is convinced that the war is lost but he goes on talking like that. But his knees were shaking. Did you notice it?"

"How do you know he is convinced that the war is lost?" asked Hans.

"Oh, I know." Gudrun made a grimace as if to show that she knew a great deal. Suddenly she burst out violently: "I don't care if you tell on me to the Gestapo. I also think the war is lost, and I'm afraid. The English and the Americans will bomb us too. We shall all be killed. Whoever says differently, lies. My father, my mother, every-

body is lying. But I know. Louise also knew. She hated me. And she had no idea that I too knew. My father was after her. My mother goes with the *Obersturmbannfuehrer*. Father is afraid of him and doesn't dare say a word. Mother and Father hate me because I'm not blonde, because I'm ugly and sickly—they don't care for what is in my heart, they don't care that I have a soul, nobody does, nobody cares. . . ." She buried her face in her arms on the table and wept bitterly.

Leni stroked her dirty, neglected hair. "Don't despair, Gudrun," she said softly. "If you look for them you will find people who feel like you, friends, real friends who will care very much about you. On whom you can rely. To whom you can always go. But you have to win their confidence first. We are all afraid of one another."

Looking up the girl asked: "Would you listen to me? Would you be a friend like that?"

"Yes, Gudrun, I should like to."

The girl got up and embraced Leni and clung to her as if she wanted never to let go of her. Suddenly she tore herself away, ran out of the kitchen and upstairs to her room. They heard her slam the door and close herself in.

Hans had not said a word. He was staring at the table in front of him, and only got up when Leni touched his shoulder.

It was late that night, toward morning, when Leni awoke dreaming that Hans was kissing her, but then she realized it was no dream. He was really kissing her and saying soft words.

"Hans, why don't you sleep?" she asked, but smiled happily in the darkness.

"Because I love you and because I have so little time to love you."

"And I love you, Hans."

He closed her mouth with his hand, and they lay silent

for a long while, until he said: "I cannot change any more. I cannot become again what I once was. There are no dreams left. You don't know what I know about myself. You don't know the things I have done. If we had been wrong—no, you cannot ask me to believe that. You cannot ask me that."

"I ask you to begin a new life with me. We two alone, a new life."

"I could not forget what I know about myself. I could never make good what I have done. There is no new life for me. I have to go on fighting."

"But then, Hans, we shall be enemies."

"I know."

The darkness of the night was deep and pervasive. It was as if no objects existed, no room, no walls, no world even. They were alone, man and wife, alone and so close—but could not find each other. They could embrace, lose themselves; their bodies miraculously remembering the beginning of all existence could give them the taste of happiness. But again they were back at the starting point, back to that night, between an old day and another day. Their hearts might still beat in the same rhythm—but their minds were far apart and they could not find each other.

"Do you really love me, Leni?" he asked again.

"I do."

"Would you want to die if I should die?"

"It would be the end of my life."

"You mean it."

"Yes, Hans."

He got up; he overturned a chair. Then it was dead quiet. The next thing she heard was a metallic click. Seized by foreboding and fear she sat up and turned on the lamp on the table beside the couch.

He stood near the black, shining piano, his army pistol in his right hand.

"No, Hans, no!" She shrank away, she raised her arms in senseless defense. "No, Hans, don't do it. Oh, Hans . . ."

He stared at her, motionlessly, without raising the pistol—just stared at her, coldly, mercilessly.

She left the couch, stepped hesitatingly nearer to him, rushed up and took the pistol away from him. He let her take it, did not resist in the least. But the next moment he raised his hand and slapped her across the mouth. . . .

The dawn was creeping closer to the windows. Hans slept. Leni sat in a chair as if she too were asleep, but her eyes were wide open.

## X I I

LIKE a diver coming up from the bottom of the sea, Hans emerged through waves of thinning darkness from a heavy, dreamless sleep. As he opened his eyes on the new day nothing at first seemed different from the previous morning: there was the same quietness, the same ruffled emptiness on the pillow beside him, the breakfast tray on the little table. He looked at it without moving. A cigarette and matches lay beside the coffee cup. A cigarette! Leni had thought of it again. Over the chair hung their common towel. Their precious little piece of soap was placed on top of it.

Hans smiled, sat up and turned. He had expected to hear, as on the morning before, Leni's "Good morning, Hans," and was all the more startled by her absence. He had wanted to shoot her and himself. Now, in daylight, it seemed stupid, and he was glad to be alive. The rain had stopped. The bits of sky which he could see through the attic windows were blue, and the sun was shining brightly. Its rays struck the floor at a sharp angle. It must be toward midday, Hans thought, and stretched his arms and yawned.

He drank the cold ersatz coffee that tasted even more sour than the black soup which they got at the front. He ate the damp bread. Carefully he broke the cigarette in two, to save one half for later in the day. But then without noticing it he smoked both halves while pondering what had made him want to die last night.

The more he thought of it, the clearer it became to him that for some time he had been secretly harboring the idea of suicide. Not as an easy flight, but as a willing acceptance of the consequence of failure and defeat, as he had always before been willing to die for victory of the Third Reich.

This readiness to make the supreme sacrifice for his beliefs as well as for his deeds had given him reassurance and quieted his conscience. The readiness to die had lifted him above the herd, above the petty slaves of life who thought of nothing but saving their skin. No, never would he live for the sake of mere existence!

Suddenly Hans began to laugh. If Leni had not interfered last night, his hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Alderman, would have had to cope with a lot of trouble this morning. And he laughed still more as he pictured Meissner receiving the report about the suicide of the ardent disciple who had said a most emphatic "No!" to everything. Hans could see him bend over the stolen furlough paper and put two and two together, only to realize that for two weeks he had been hoodwinked by a deserter. But against a dead man even the almighty Herr SS Captain Meissner was powerless.

Or was he? With a start Hans remembered an order of the day read to his company behind the ruins of a Russian factory about half a year ago. They were informed that from then on the relatives of a soldier would be held responsible for his conduct, and that the punishment which could not be administered to a deserter who had escaped to the enemy, or to a coward who had killed himself, would be dealt out to his wife and children, or to his parents.

Hans was thinking of his parents and his sister when the door opened.

Leni entered cautiously, her eyes on the door handle, which she moved noiselessly. Only when she turned did she see that Hans was awake and watching her. Instantly she stopped, bending forward slightly on her toes, swaying like a small tree in a gentle wind, as her forward movement was checked. Her hair was ruffled. She stroked it back. She was very pale, except for two unhealthy red spots on her cheeks, and out of breath. When she finally spoke she made a pause after almost every word. These pauses gave the im-

pression that she was thinking of something different from what she was saying, or as if there were another, deeper sense than the obvious one behind her words.

"I am late. Sorry. Good morning. It is spring outside, almost spring," she said. Falling silent she moved toward Hans, but sat down on the first chair she reached, clearly at the end of her strength.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," she repeated.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Where have you been?"

Staring beyond him she remained silent. Her cheeks glowed hectically.

"Where have you been?" he asked once more.

"I don't know. Nowhere. Just walking. It is spring outside, almost spring." Again the pauses.

Hans rose from the couch and put on his long army coat. As he stepped nearer to Leni he noticed that her lower lip was slightly bruised and swollen. Only now did he remember slapping her in the face after she had taken the pistol away from him.

Leni covered the bruised part of her lip, and said hastily: "It does not matter any more, Hans."

"I did not mean to hurt you," he said.

"I am over it now." And a second time she said: "I am over it now."

The stillness between them grew. Hans wanted to move close to her, but did not dare. She gazed into space, immobile, but the blood was throbbing rapidly in the veins on her temples.

She took the hand from her lip, lifted her head with a short, jerky movement and regarded him with the seriousness of a child. Then she spoke, calmly, without the stumbling pauses.

"At first I could not think of anything," she began. "I was only sad, sadder than ever before in my life. Then I hated

you. When morning came and the sun rose I counted the days since our wedding. Only two days. And I heard again what the priest had said to us: 'Live as Christians and bring your children up as Christians.' "

Anger flared up in Hans's heart. He began to dislike Leni in this cringing mood. If she had thrown something at him in fury he would have laughed and taken her into his arms and loved her the more for it. This way she only made him hard again, harder than he wanted to be to her.

"I thought of those words for a long time," Leni continued. "Then I brought you breakfast and sat down near you and waited for you to awake. But you slept and slept and I began to hate you again. So I left the house and wandered through the streets. I thought of never coming back to you, of never seeing you again."

"But you came back," he said coldly.

"Yes. I am your wife, Hans."

"That's the reason? Because we are married? Because that priest did his hocus-pocus?" He was getting really furious now.

"No, Hans. I came back because I love you and cannot help it."

"Are you sorry about it?"

"Yes, I am, and—at the same time I am not."

He was touched by these words, but only twenty-four hours remained of his furlough. He had no time for solving riddles.

She saw the lines in his face sharpen. "Don't get angry," she pleaded fearfully.

He looked down at her. Her eyes too were swollen. She must have cried throughout the rest of the night; and she looked as if she were about to cry again. He would not be able to bear it. A crying woman in the morning! He would rather be back at the front.

"I'm not angry." He took the soap and the towel from the chair, and left for the bath room on the floor below.



When he returned Leni—as on the previous morning—was airing the bedclothes in front of an open window and straightening up the room. They did not speak and avoided looking at each other. He dressed and then looked for his pistol. Finding it on the piano he put it back into the holster. Then he realized that Leni was standing before him, anxiety written all over her face.

"We must talk, Hans," she said with an effort.

"Talk? What about?"

"About everything, Hans. Our life, the future, our thoughts. We must understand each other. I don't want to be your enemy."

There they were again at the point they had reached during the night, before he got up for his pistol. But now it was daytime. The sun was shining. He pressed his hands on Leni's shoulders and said with emphasis: "The less we talk the better. Words won't change anything. Leave me in peace."

Her eyes grew blank. She moved her lips—the bruised one irritated him again—but no sound came from him. Then she turned away from him and began to wander through the large room.

"You are running away from yourself," Leni said from the end of the room. "That's what you wanted to do last night also: to run away. I am sorry for you."

He had had enough of it! No one need be sorry for him. He clenched his fists, but kept himself under control.

"Let's visit my mother," he said putting on his coat. "I want to say good-by to her."

Slowly Leni came to the middle of the room. An expression of pain and mockery crossed her face. Then she quoted what Hans had said on their wedding night: "We shall live these two days as if there were no war, and neither look back nor ahead."

"Yes, I said that," he shouted, his fist coming down on the piano. "Yes—but it didn't work out. It's not my fault.

There is nothing but the war. We stumble over it with every step. Wherever we look—nothing else! The food tastes of war; every word echoes it; the air smells of it. There is nothing but the war.”

He stopped short and went over to Leni and took her in his arms. After a while he said calmly: “We have to finish the war first. We have to win it before we can live.”

“The war is lost,” said Leni.

“Then we’ll go down anyway. Better to go down fighting than——”

He broke off and did not finish. She continued for him: “—than to have done to us what we did to others.”

“Yes, that’s it,” he said sharply.

The next moment her arms were around him. “Oh, Hans, say that we are not so far apart; have no secrets from me. You can trust me. Together we will find a way——”

“There is no other way,” he snapped. “Either we win or we perish.”

“No, Hans, no, that is not true!” Her voice gave out. He felt her shaking from head to foot as she clung to him, desperately holding herself upright.

He led her to the couch and made her stretch out. Sitting down beside her, stroking her hair, he said again: “You must rest now. Later we can talk. First get some sleep.”

“You *will* talk to me? You’ll listen to me? You promise?”

“I promise.”

“We must do everything together, Hans. Don’t you understand? You are not alone any more. We are husband and wife now.” A sudden smile made her eyes sparkle.

“But first you must sleep, Leni.”

“I shall, Hans. I am so tired.”

Slowly she closed her eyes, then opened them again. “It’s beautiful outside,” she whispered. “Spring, almost spring.”

After Leni had fallen asleep Hans went downstairs. No one seemed to be home except the Polish maid. At sight of

him she ran in a panic to the kitchen as if she had seen the devil. He left the house and walked leisurely down the street, his coat unbuttoned despite regulations. It was really the first spring day and reminded him of all the first spring days he had experienced in the war. The most beautiful had been the one a year ago on the Russian front, when they realized that the terrible winter was over at last. It was still cold on that morning as they came out of their holes, but they could smell spring in the air. No one spoke about it but they all felt like praying to the sun that had risen in a sparkling sky.

Turning into a broad thoroughfare Hans became conscious of hunger and remembered the ration cards in his pocket. Finally he found a restaurant, an overcrowded place with many people waiting in line, but as a front soldier he got a seat fairly soon. The table was occupied by workmen who stopped their conversation as he sat down, and remained silent. He felt uncomfortable and stayed only long enough to gulp down the dreary *Eintopfgericht* (one-course meal)—a potato soup with bits of herring.

Strolling aimlessly, he began to feel as if he were being propelled through a strange and foreign world. Whatever he saw was remote from his interests. He knew all about the importance of the home front and its sufferings. He had seen enough of these in the past two weeks and felt no sympathy with the civilians who were hurtling back and forth with sour faces. Defeatists, all of them!

Meeting an SS man who wore an Iron Cross first class, as he himself did, Hans saluted and stepped up to him in a sudden desire to speak.

"Nice day," he said.

"What's nice about it?" the SS man asked. "I wish it were night." The man yawned and seemed hardly able to stand on his feet.

"Tired?" asked Hans.

"Forty-eight hours on duty. These damned air-raid fugitives! Why don't they stay home and take it!"

"The government is evacuating them, isn't it?"

"I'm talking about the runaways. Instead of staying at their jobs as ordered, they desert. And we have to catch them. Deserters, that's what they are. They should be shot. But, hell, you can't shoot them all. They are needed for work."

"What do you do with them?"

"Ship them back where they came from. But first you have to catch them. There are thousands of them."

The SS man yawned again, but the next moment he shot across the street and picked up a civilian who had come out of a house, glancing furtively to right and left, incessantly shaking his head and twitching his arms and legs like an epileptic. The SS man dragged him to a truck half-filled with prisoners that was moving slowly down the street. They were catching them like dogs.

As Hans walked on he was accosted by a little gray-bearded fellow who asked him whether he was a furlougher. Hans answered in the affirmative and the man offered to guide him for a few marks to a place where a furlougher could have a fine time. When Hans declined, the man offered to sell him a line of goods: liquor, soap, buttons, needles, textiles. Hans entered a dark hallway with him, and the man, like the woman from whom Hans had bought before, produced from under his coat the promised articles. Hans bought another piece of soap for his mother, and a pair of stockings for Leni. He would also have liked to buy a bottle of brandy, but had not enough money left.

"Next time—if there is a next time," said the little gray-bearded fellow enigmatically, and disappeared.

On the way back to the house Hans bought a newspaper and read it while walking. Since his return he had been indifferent to the news of the world. He saw from the war communiqué that the front where his regiment had last

been stationed had shifted farther to the west. If he ever found his company again he would need to have a plausible story about his doings. But there was enough time to think about that when he was near the front again and saw how things were.

There was nothing else in the paper of interest to him. An appeal to the population of Dresden to be kind to the évacués; the pep-talk of a Gauleiter; an SS order signed by Meissner decreeing the death penalty for black marketeers and heavy prison terms for their customers. Hans felt the purchases in his pocket and thought that the little fellow who had sold them did not seem very much afraid of Meissner. Surely the decree was only a blind, and the SS and the black marketeers were business partners.

The paper had only four pages. On the last, an item from his home district caught Hans's attention. Three people of his village had been beheaded at dawn this morning for helping foreigners to escape. He stood still, sick at his stomach when he read the name of Leni's aunt among those executed. He had liked her, although she had had no particular love for him.

Hans crushed the paper between his hands. He slowed his pace. Should he keep the bad news from Leni? Should he depart for the front and let her face it alone? And what if the SS or the Gestapo were to link her to her aunt's activities? What if they were looking for her?

Hans did not know what had occurred that night when Leni had disappeared from the lonely house in the mountains, and Aunt Minna had detected the traces of blood leading across the mountainside into the Devil's Wood, where they had found Leni on her knees, praying in a tremor as if she had received the fright of her life. He had deliberately refrained from asking her what she had done and what had happened to her. What you don't know won't hurt you! But he had had his ideas about it. At dawn the

aunt had rushed them out of the house—she must have expected the Gestapo.

Thinking about Leni's aunt and her quiet determination, Hans felt increasing assurance as to Leni's safety. Such a woman would surely have done everything to divert suspicion from her niece. And the fact that she had been executed without Leni's being questioned—was it not a sign that Leni had remained out of the picture?

He decided to keep silent about the whole affair—bad news never came too late.

They arrived at his brother-in-law's apartment late in the afternoon. Hans had waited for Leni to wake. She scolded him for letting her sleep so long, but she was well rested and quite changed, her hysterical exaltation of the morning being gone. She behaved normally, and even as if she wanted to make amends for some wrong she had done him. She hugged him and went out of bounds with delight at the stockings. Not by one word did she advert to their scene of the morning.

With a sense of relief he followed her lead, and they had a happy time on their way to the other end of the town. Lightheartedly they bought food for a family dinner, using up the rest of Hans's ration cards for which he would have no further need. They laughed and teased each other in lovers' fashion, indifferent to the gloomy passengers in the trolley car who watched them with open and disapproving envy. But when they left the crowded car—becoming separated for a moment by people struggling to get in or out—Leni's happy expression vanished the instant she thought herself unobserved by him. And then, walking through the darkening street, they both remained silent. The short interlude of make-believe was over.

Hans's mother admitted them as she had admitted Hans when he first arrived home on his furlough. Now, as then,

she slowly raised both arms, hesitating, trembling, to embrace her son and cling to him, weeping.

"Father is sick," she whispered, "so ill that even the Nazis——" She checked herself and looked up in fear at her son who was one of them. Then she looked questioningly at Leni.

"She is my wife, now," Hans explained. And as his mother seemed not to understand, he repeated: "She is my wife, Mother. We are married." The two women fell into each other's arms; Hans did not know where to look.

At that moment Hans's little nephew, Herbert, came out of his room and greeted his hero-uncle militarily. He was in his Hitler Youth uniform, ready to leave for an air-raid drill. Hans gave the command, "At ease," and the boy explained to him excitedly that he and his friends were now real soldiers doing duty every night at the anti-aircraft guns. "I hope the English and Americans attack soon," he said. "We'll show them!"

After Herbert had left, Hans joined his mother and Leni. They were in Herbert's room on the sofa under the big portrait of the Fuehrer. "I am so happy, Hans," his mother said. "I prayed every day that you two might find each other. I cannot give you any wedding present. I can only say to you both: hold together, whatever comes, hold together."

"We shall," said Leni.

Hesitating briefly Hans too said: "We shall, Mother." It was as if they were being married for a second time.

A pause followed before Hans asked: "What's the matter with Father?"

"He is very sick. The doctor says that his heart is breaking." And with these words she rose and left the room, fluttering through the door like a feather. She had lost weight noticeably in the last fortnight. But even more than by her haggard looks, Hans was again disturbed by her neglected appearance. What had become of the trim school-

teacher's wife, as he remembered her, always wearing a startlingly white apron?

She came back and sat down again beside Leni. "I told Father that you two were married."

Hans waited for her to reveal his father's reaction, but she remained silent.

"I'd like to see Father," he hazarded.

"No, Hans, he is too weak; it might excite him too much."

"I have to talk to him," he heard himself say, against his will.

"No, Hansl, don't try." And after a pause she added with difficulty: "He does not want to see you."

"He doesn't want to see me." Hans repeated it like a dull echo, and it seemed to resound from every wall. "He doesn't want to see me"—while he wondered what had made him ask to see his father—his greatest enemy—and what he would have said.

He turned to a large map of European Russia on the wall beside Herbert's bed. Little swastikas marked the front. To be back out there doing his duty! No doubts creeping up on you like snakes, weakening you, destroying your morale! He ought never to have come back.

Complete silence settled down on the room. Through the closed door one heard the dripping of the kitchen faucet. Couldn't somebody find time to repair the damned thing! It angered Hans. The next moment he was observing a bedbug slowly moving across the map into the Black Sea. It was hard to stomach the fact that his mother had to live in a dirty, infested hole like this, while the SS were snug in her old home in the village.

"It's fortunate that I don't have to go to work tonight," he heard her say.

"Why not? What has happened?" Leni asked eagerly, as if expecting some particular reply.



"Trouble with the machines. They say someone poured sand into the motors."

She had spoken a shade too matter-of-factly; it disclosed the satisfaction she had intended to hide. He was sure that if he turned he would see triumph on Leni's face. But he checked himself. Yes, what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Fine, if his mother had a night off. It was not his business to spy on his mother and his wife. He was the front soldier; Meissner, the policeman.

The hall door creaked on its hinges.

"Bertha and Karl are coming," said his mother.

"We've brought some food for dinner," Leni explained and got up.

They had finished eating and were talking about old times and the present—guardedly—always reaching an invisible frontier which none dared to cross. Leni reported about the village—the évacués quartered in every house; the death of the priest; their hurried wedding at the resort down at the foot of the mountain, and the nice room they had finally found here in town. She skipped the night when Hans had found her in the Devil's Wood, and there were other omissions in her story. Hans sensed that there were also omissions in what his sister and brother-in-law, and even his mother, told. There was no allusion to the war or politics, though every word led that way.

The entire conversation moved under a strain, in half-spoken sentences, through painful pauses, from one unfinished subject to another. For a while it interested Hans to watch them conceal their true feelings, to catch their furtive glances which spoke a language different from their words. And even these glances often seemed to have two meanings—an innocuous one for him and a meaningful one for everyone else.

The moment came when Hans had had enough. "I'm sorry for all of you," he cried. "One day the SS will get you,

you fools! This time it won't be like 1918! You won't be allowed to stab the front in the back."

"No, it will not be like 1918 this time!" The answer came sharply from his sister, of all people, who had never before been interested in politics. "This time we will finish with every last one who brought the war upon us."

Curiously, Hans felt pity for her. And he did not think of getting into an argument—in twenty-four hours he would be going back to the front. But provoked by the personal hatred against him that spoke from her words, he answered automatically: "You and your friends will be finished first."

His sister bridled, but before she could answer she slumped forward, pressing her hands against her stomach. Karl put an arm around her and helped her onto Herbert's bed as on the evening of Hans's homecoming. Her cramps again!

Karl, pale and angry, turned from the bed and said quietly: "You keep your Nazi mouth shut in my house, Hans, or I'll throw you out again."

"Don't speak like that, Karl!" Hans's mother cried and put a trembling hand on his arm. And Leni looked at him pleadingly. It made Hans think of her Aunt Minna, of how pathetic they all were, and, again, that in a few hours he would be gone anyway. He did not answer Karl and remained seated.

A train shrieked past the windows. Karl was bending over his wife, who lay quietly, her face testifying her pain. It was very still, until suddenly Karl burst out: "I can't stand it any longer! They are killing her! They are killing us all, these criminals, these murderers!" Hans thought: "Only to get out of here!" With a glance at Leni he rose from the table, and his mother no longer held him back.

"Be still, Karl," pleaded Bertha.

But Karl would not listen. He stepped in front of Hans. "You are killing her—all for your insanity, for your war.

But you are losing the war and we shall do everything to make you lose it. You can kill us all, but you'll lose the war. You'll be finished. And one day we'll wipe you from the face of this earth. And now—go, you louse, and squeal on me to your friend Meissner."

Hans's right hand grasped his pistol. Leni jumped to her feet, Bertha sat up with a cry, his mother covered her face—and in the instant Hans had the wonderful feeling of rediscovering his true self. He relaxed and looked calmly into Karl's unshaven face, in whose sunken features, hunger for revenge, demoralization, and despair were written. Many doubts that had plagued Hans during these days vanished. To die in battle was a better fate than to fall into the hands of his brothers. And he answered, his voice gaining assurance with every word: "You ought to be the last one, Karl, to sneer at me. We may have started something we can't finish, that won't be according to our dreams. We may even have been wrong. But at least we were always ready to die for our convictions. No one will say that about you and your friends. You were here before us. You promised us paradise, but did nothing to bring it about. You lived your petty lives and waited for miracles. But there are no miracles. Only war and revolution, victory and defeat. Nothing else. We fought while you jabbered to forget your bad consciences. I'd rather be wrong and die a Nazi than be right and have your kind of life."

"You—you—you're crazy!" Karl stammered. Then he broke down, dropped into a chair, and wept like a child. His wife gave him a look of contempt and lay back on the bed. Again it grew so still that the faint sound of the dripping faucet came through the closed kitchen door.

Hans and Leni were about to leave when sharp knocks on the wall broke the silence. Instantly his mother was on her feet. "It's Father," she said and hurried out. A moment later she was back. "He wants to see us all," she whispered.

They stood at the foot of the bed on which the old man lay, fully dressed, covered with a torn blanket and his overcoat. As on the evening of his homecoming, Hans was reminded of the mad king with the three wicked daughters, in the play whose name he was still unable to remember. Like the king's, his father's white hair was disheveled and fell in strands over his emaciated face which was strangely animated by a tense expression and by his glowing eyes.

"Good evening, Father," said Bertha.

"Good evening, Father," Hans heard himself say, after a pause.

The old man closed his eyes and breathed heavily. Then he said in a weak voice that seemed to come from afar: "Good evening, children." He turned to the shelf and took out a large volume, opened it, and ran through its pages with caressing fingers. After another spell of labored breathing he began to read, only casually glancing at the book, his weak voice growing stronger:

"And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him and his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast. And these both were cast alive into a lake of fire. And the remnants were slain with the sword and all the fowls were filled with their flesh."

Hans felt the grip of Leni's hand as the old man went on in a rising voice:

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the devil and Satan, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more."

After a short pause, in which the old man let the book slide from his hands, he continued to the end:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded and had not worshipped the beast, and they lived and reigned with Christ."

Exhausted, the old man let his head sink into the pillow, while a smile flickered on his face. And opening wide the eyes that were calm now and very human, he looked at Hans and said: "If ever I did you any wrong, forgive me, my son."

Hans could not speak. He felt the urgent clasp of Leni's hand, he felt everyone looking at him, but he was tongue-tied. His throat was dry as dust. A noose lay around his neck, tighter and tighter, strangling him. He wanted to speak yet was glad that he could not. The softer his heart grew the more stubborn became his will—for he had been the disciple of the beast and the false prophet for too long.

And as the tension increased in the small room with its unbearable silence, and the suspense within him threatened to tear Hans apart, he turned, and, without having spoken a word, stumbled out into the passage, out of the apartment, and down the stairs.

But his father did not know it. His wife knelt at his side and whispered: "He asks you to forgive him. He is a good son. He has come back to us."

And the dying man smiled, and his wrinkled face seemed to become smooth and young as his eyes closed forever.

Leni paced the street in front of the alderman's house. It was long past midnight. As soon as she had felt able to leave she had run after Hans, but when she reached the street he was out of sight. She had searched the neighborhood for him and had gone back to the family apartment, but he had not returned. Nor did she find him at the station. Now she had been waiting in the street for hours, resisting the thought that she would never see him again.

At dawn she went to her attic room, dozed off and awak-

ened at the slightest noise. She waited through the day and still refused to believe that she would never see him again.

At dusk he came. She heard his heavy steps on the stairs. Then he stood in the door, unshaved, unkempt. When he came near she smelt liquor, just as on that fateful evening when he had followed her to her aunt's house in the mountains. But this time he did not embrace or kiss her.

"Yesterday I promised to talk to you and to listen to you," he said, looking straight past her. "That's what I've been doing all night long and all day. I've heard everything you could possibly say. But it's no use. I have to go back and fight. Maybe out there I will begin to see what you want me to see. I don't know why I think that. But out there in the loneliness perhaps . . . here I can't breathe any more."

"Your father is dead, Hans," she said.

He did not answer. He packed her yellow valise and when finished, said: "If you'd walk with me to the station, quietly, without talk, I would never forget it."

After a long pause during which he waited patiently, helplessly, she answered: "I'll do it. I am your wife."

Gudrun, the alderman's unhappy child, was downstairs. They said "Good-by," and Hans asked her to thank her parents for letting them stay in the attic room.

"They've flown to Paris," said the girl.

This sentence began to hammer in Leni's head as they walked arm in arm through the dusk. "They've flown to Paris." Again and again, like the refrain of a song, the phrase returned while she cudgeled her brain for something with which to break the wall that Hans had built around himself. It could not be, it must not be, that they should part this way. But she was so weary, too weary to think any more. "They've flown to Paris. . . ." What could she do to make him understand that he was going to die for the Meissners, the aldermen, and the *Obersturmbannführers*—who had all flown to Paris . . . ?

Hans halted and looked at her. Her heart began to pound, mad with hope. There was such an honest expression in his eyes, so much love for her—more than ever before—that she could not help thinking that everything would be right and good and beautiful the next moment.

"There is one thing I must tell you," he said. "I don't want you to learn about it when you are alone. It'll hit you hard."

"Nothing can be worse . . ." she began, but could not go on.

"Your aunt has been arrested."

There was a pause. Then Leni said softly: "She expected it. That's why she drove us out of the house."

"Yes, Leni, I know. Brace yourself. That's not all. She is dead."

Her eyes grew wide with horror. She seemed about to faint and he gripped her arm to support her but immediately she stiffened. He watched her struggle to get herself under control. And she succeeded. Only her face—he had never seen a face as white as that, or a mouth as sharp and hard as hers had become.

"I won't faint, Hans," she said, stepping away from him. And then she repeated to herself the words which his father had recited before he died. The words of St. John, the apostle:

"And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded and had not worshipped the beast, and they lived and reigned with Christ."

Once more she swayed as if she were going to fall, but she kept herself upright. "You'll miss your train, Hans, if we stay here much longer," she said and started on.

He did not take her arm again. Silently, quite apart from each other, they walked, quicker and quicker. He would have liked to utter a word of love now, but it seemed too late. When the station came into sight Leni said: "You were right, Hans. Talk is of no use."

Out of pain and bitterness she had spoken. But as they crossed the square and the high black door of the station entrance came nearer, these words began ringing in her ears, sharper with every step. If talk was of no use—perhaps deeds were. Her aunt had never talked. The circus people had never talked. "Maybe out there I will begin to see what you wanted me to see," Hans had said. But out there there was no choice but to kill or be killed.

She stood still as if very tired. As he came close to her she looked up at him and said in a tone that was strained, almost hard: "Good-by, Hans, good-by."

"Come on, Leni," he said after a while, nothing else. And with no further word, they walked into the station.

Very soon he learned what had been on her mind. They had reached the upper landing of the broad staircase that ascended from the entrance hall which was filled with soldiers bidding farewell to their wives and children. He started upon noticing that Leni was no longer at his side. Looking about he realized that she had climbed on to the broad marble balustrade. The next moment she was shouting down into the hall: "Soldiers! Don't go to the front. Fight your real enemies, the Nazis. Down with the war! Down with the Fuehrer!"

Instantly the bustle in the crowded hall ceased. Thousands of eyes were looking up to her in the dead silence.

"Down with the war! Down with the Fuehrer!" she shouted once more. Then the flash of a gun cut the air, hard and short. She flung her arms high and tumbled down into space.

The next morning at daybreak a farmer walking along a lonely country road through the dense forest southeast of Dresden got the surprise of his life. A soldier, looking as wild as the devil, stepped out from behind a huge rock and, at pistol point, robbed him of his clothes, giving him in exchange his military coat from which all insignia had been



torn. Before retreating into the woods the soldier warned the farmer not to talk about this and to burn his coat at once. Though the farmer was at first enraged—clothes were unobtainable at any price—he whistled cheerfully as he went home. "So, the soldiers are beginning to desert," he said to himself. And that was fine with him.

Hans went deep into the woods, changed his clothes, and burned his uniform and whatever might serve to identify him. After that he rehearsed the shaking of the head and twitching of arms and legs—the symptoms of shell-shock which he had seen often enough, even on the preceding day when the SS was rounding up the air-raid runaways.

Then he walked for another hour, carefully avoiding roads and paths, until he came to a clearing. There he lay down in a haystack to sleep. But, exhausted though he was, sleep would not come. Through his mind passed the images of all the people he had met in these last fourteen days—the comrade whom he had shot to get his furlough paper; his mother, his father, Leni's aunt, the priest, Meissner, the countess, the circus people, poor Gudrun—there seemed no end of them. Then his mind reverted once more, as it had been doing steadily throughout the night and day, to that moment when something had snapped within him. He could almost hear the click in his brain. Or was it the ghastly sound as Leni struck the floor of the station?

The SS had come in search of the soldier who had been with the girl. They had actually questioned Hans, but he was no fool; his papers were in order, and they did not like to hold back a soldier who was on his way to the Russian front. However, when the train came in he did not enter it.

When the SS gave up their search he left the station. An SS officer descended the steps in front of him—he wished it were Meissner. He would have stuck the pistol in him and pulled the trigger. That would have been the right beginning for his new life.

His new life! He thought of it again at night as he wan-

dered, hungry and freezing, over fields toward the dark outlines of a village. A dog began to bark, announcing his approach. His new life. . . . It lay in darkness. In his mind he did not as yet have any perception of it. His old life had taught him many terrible lessons—he felt for his pistol instinctively, because he knew what people were like—because he knew himself.

Or were there still people on this earth like his parents? Like Leni?















UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



136 293

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY